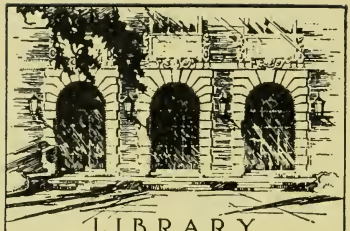
Cancelled Bonds

Henry Cresswell



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CANCELLED BONDS

BY

HENRY CRESSWELL

AUTHOR OF

"A MODERN GREEK HEROINE," "A WOMAN'S AMBITION,"
"A WILY WIDOW," "SLIDING SANDS," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
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WORKS BY HENRY CRESSWELL.

NOVELS.

A MODERN GREEK HEROINE.
FAIR AND FREE.
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THE SINS OF THE FATHERS.
THE SURVIVORS.
A WILY WIDOW.
MY LORD OTHELLO.
SLIDING SANDS.
THE HERMITS OF CRIZEBECK.
FAIREST OF THREE.
A WOMAN'S AMBITION.
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DRAMA.

THE CONVERSION OF ENGLAND.
IN DANGER.
(By HENRY CRESSWELL and W. LESTOCQ.)

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CANCELLED BONDS.

CHAPTER I.

The picture possessed a fascination that was irresistible.

It hung on the line in the second gallery, and all day long a crowd stood before it. The men who came in as soon as the doors were opened, to 'do the Academy' in a hurried half-hour on their way to business, paused before it, amongst the little knot of early visitors, and lost in their admiration of it their scant opportunity of seeing the other pictures of the

year. The people who strolled perfunctorily through the galleries only 'because one must, you know,' became suddenly interested as their listless eyes fell upon the young girl in amber. Those who came not to see, but to be seen, and those who came because others brought them—much against their will—found their attention arrested, and looked at their catalogues to read, '104. Neglected. *Major Torres.*' The country cousins, who can never remember the names either of the pictures or of the artists, and the people who, grudging to pay an extra sixpence for a catalogue, do without knowing them, asked one another, 'Have you seen the picture of the jealous girl?' and went away with all their other impressions more or less obliterated by the recollection of a tall, dark lass, in evening costume—whether she was really handsome or not was disputed—whose jealous,

black eyes haunted their memory. Years hence those people will still talk about her, when the Academy is mentioned in their hearing: 'I remember a picture which I saw at the Academy—I forget when—a long time ago—a dark girl, in an amber dress, who looked at you as if she would like to kill you. I think it was called "Jealousy."' Because, after a few years, visitors of this class become fully convinced that the pictures are called by the names which they have themselves chosen for them. People who were leaving, fatigued by the multitude of impressions received during a tour of the whole exhibition, stopped at the turnstiles to say, 'We must take one more look at the neglected lady;' and those who, having seen her a score of times, agreed, 'We need not this time look at Major Torres's picture,' if their eyes caught but a side

glimpse of it as they passed, paused like the rest, to regard the young patrician face, so gentle, and yet so passionate; so fascinating with its eloquent expression of all the girl's sense of neglect, of all the jealousy that troubled her tortured soul.

Meanwhile the artistic world asked, 'Who is Major Torres?'

The picture was not the picture of the year. The better critics found much fault with it; and those who knew declared that it would not make the Major an A.R.A., as others, who did not know, opined that it certainly must. The exhibition contained many a work finer in *motif*, and by far more excellent in execution. But Major Torres's jealous young lady in amber hit the public hard. She made everyone look at her, and compelled a good many people to think who passed by more meritorious pictures with indiscreet expressions of sur-

prise that they should have found a place 'on the line,' or 'have got hung at all.'

The Major had portrayed a girl of about twenty-one or two, of gentle birth, leaning against an oak-panelled wall. Her handsome evening dress of amber silk, simply trimmed in a manner that became her maidenhood, and her young beauty—in little need of artificial adornment—accorded with her simple jewelry, such as an unmarried girl might becomingly wear. Tall and slender, she was delicately fashioned, a low-bosomed, lissom-waisted lass, with shoulders daintily sloping, proud neck, and handsome head. Her low dress, fastened only with a knot on her shoulders, displayed the whole shapeliness of beautiful arms so far as her long gloves, one of which had partly slipped down, and left them uncovered; whilst the folds of her

drapery veiled only, without disguising them, the fine and lengthy lines of her body and graceful limbs, full of a gentle strength, as well as of beauty of contour.

Leaning against the richly-dark oak wainscot, where it met the heavy *portière* of an open door on her right, she held her head high, a head crowned with crisp hair, black as a raven's wing, of which a few stray tendrils fell over her forehead, and curled about her temples. In the intensity of her passion her tender cheeks were a little hard, the sensitive nostrils of her finely-chiselled straight nose, just perceptibly compressed, and her fresh, crimson lips joined in an angry line. From beneath her eyebrows, that were but slightly arched, her widely-opened eyes, deep and limpid in their brilliant blackness, looked straight before her, full of a regard almost fierce in its intensity, and enigmatic in its

combination of passionate energy and of girlish sensitiveness.

Fully nine-tenths of the picture's power to rivet attention and to awaken pity—for it did awaken pity—was due to its direct and extreme simplicity; to the girl's almost artless pose, to her look straight into the spectator's eyes, to the absence of anything to support the passion in her face and lustrous pupils.

Yet moments of inspiration must have attended her creation, for something inexpressibly sad and tender characterised her expression. There was magic too in her handsomeness. That handsomeness was not merely of a common, perfectly evident sort, but such as grew upon the spectator, so that she seemed to become momentarily handsomer and more handsome the longer she was regarded, until all the injured magnificence of her beauty, unappreciated

at the first instant, dazzled the eyes and held them captive.

Nor was art wanting in the composition. If technically speaking the picture could be lightly set aside as a merely clever big sketch, just saved by its extraordinary spirit, brilliance, fearlessness, and directness from being flashy and commonplace, it was still undeniable that telling masses of light and shade and brilliant harmonies and contrasts had been managed in a masterly manner; whilst the skill of the painter was equally exhibited in the noteworthy crispness and refinement of the more subtilely graded tints.

The treatment of the background was happy. Against it, as a whole, the girl stood out as a being of light set in a world of gloom—a circumstance that seemed to heighten the contrast between the attractiveness of her person, and the passionate

sense of neglect in her face. Through the open door on her right the spectator looked across a large, handsome, dimly-lighted, empty room, from which a second door, opposite the first, opened upon yet another beyond where a party were dancing. By the second door stood a group of men talking, prompting a speculation whether it was one of them that was the occasion of the girl's ferocious jealousy.

For she was jealous! How jealous! In every line of the delicate face, so young and soft, was legible the terrible jealousy of an excitable nature, incapable of bearing slight or neglect, and in her dark eyes a look which suggested descent from some race—perhaps more southern—wonted to find fatal methods of revenge in return for wrongs. On every woman who stopped before her, she seemed to fasten the regard

of those darkly limpid eyes of hers with a passionate, 'It was *you!* How dared you? You knew that he was mine!' On every man with a fierce, 'You know you are mine! You shall not *look* at her!'

CHAPTER II.

Towards the end of the afternoon of a day late in June, two young men stood on the outside of the crowd gathered before 'No. 104,' awaiting their turn to get a sight of the painting.

It was easy to detect in one of them the weakness of a man accustomed to bestow a good deal of attention upon his dress. Only, in this case, the weakness was so far pardonable that the result was a good-looking young fellow, of six or seven-and-twenty, attired with a taste that forbade any charge of dandyism. He had also all

the air of being perfectly well able to afford to wear garments which, in every particular of exact cut and shade, accorded with the strictest masculine fashion of the moment—the most approved proportions of collar, cuff, and silk necktie, and the correctest accessories of cane and watch-chain—so that it might perhaps be said that he was simply setting an excellent example of how a gentleman of means should display in his dress a regard for his own personal appearance, and for the gratification of the eyes of his fellow-citizens. He stood five feet eleven; a fair man, with light-brown hair that curled a little over his high temples, and a small moustache, a shade darker than his hair; with well-proportioned features drawn in firm lines, bright brown eyes with a sparkling light, a nose inclining to be aquiline, and a mouth of some determination. His

face wore the easy, light-hearted expression of a man accustomed to take life gaily.

His companion was of an entirely different stamp. Also tall, indeed of about the same height, he was several years younger, very young for a man—because a man is very young at two-and-twenty—dark, with hair of jet, and impressive dark eyes. He came near being handsome, but was not so. His features showed the indelible traces of degeneracy of outline that are so common a consequence of ill-health—from which he had suffered at times during his boyhood. His lips had the dull outlines of a much older man, and each cheek presented a deep, hollow fold sharply cut. For all that he was not ill-favoured. Much of the plainness of his face was atoned for by his really fine eyes—deep, and almost as darkly lustrous as

those of the girl in the picture. Closely shaven—so that he might have passed either for an actor or an ascetic—his face was intellectual, with a grave cast, that of a thinker never quite unconscious of the hundredfold variety of sombre-tinted scenes which life invariably presents to men of imperfect health and sensitive temperament.

He had come to the Academy this afternoon against his will. The man who accompanied him had quite unexpectedly run up against him in Piccadilly—some months had elapsed since their last meeting—and had insisted upon his coming with him to the picture-galleries.

'I am afraid I cannot, Torres,' he had pleaded. 'I must go to Bond Street—a commission for my sister—and I have a dozen other things to do before dinner.'

He began an enumeration.

'You cannot possibly do half those things before dinner, Peyton,' interrupted Marmaduke Torres. 'Come along with me —do: there's a good fellow. I *wish* you would. I shall not be long. I am going only to look at that picture by Major Torres about which everyone is talking. The Major is some sort of cousin of mine, or of my cousin Mrs. Dromere;—I am not quite clear which. You know there are such a lot of Torres of one kind and another. Do come! I'll walk on to Bond Street with you afterwards. You know a lot more about art and all that than I do: and I should like to have you with me. It is twenty to one that I shall not see in the picture something I ought to see, and shall make an ass of myself by saying something about it that I ought not to say. We need not stop in the place five minutes: and you can tell me something about Magdalen and

the men. You are just down, are you not? Do come; there's a good fellow.'

Lennox Peyton yielded. The invitation was too warmly expressed for him to be able to persist in a refusal. Torres and he had been schoolfellows, and chums at Magdalen, though Torres was by a good deal his senior, having commenced his university career (which was accidentally interrupted) some years earlier, and having taken his degree at the end of Peyton's first year of residence.

They proceeded together to Burlington House, Torres on the way asking questions about this man and that, who now had his old rooms, who was now captain of the cricket-club, and how it had come to pass that the boat had been bumped, until they found themselves standing in front of the painting which they had come to see.

The crowd before it moved slowly, the

spectators dropping away one or two at a time, and only gradually leaving room for others to approach.

At last, however, they found themselves facing it.

A sudden movement of surprise passed over Lennox Peyton's pensive features. Then he looked at his friend. The latter was fully occupied with the picture, and did not observe the questioning regard. Saying nothing, Lennox Peyton again turned his eyes to the canvas.

'I had no idea that Major Torres could do anything so good as that,' observed Torres, *sotto voce*, after some minutes.

The other offered no reply. He was wondering who this Major Torres might be.

The burning passion in the dark eyes of the jealous girl cast some spell of stillness around her; and, all about them, the air was full of hushed remarks, of impressive

silences and whispered impressions—'Exquisite!' 'Wonderful!' 'What eyes!'

Two men in the front row of spectators moved to leave. One of them stopped involuntarily, to look back at the picture over his shoulder.

'That girl seems to follow us with her eyes,' he remarked.

'Yes. She won't let you go,' said another.

The power of the painted maiden's eyes was really fascinating.

'One could look at her for an hour, Peyton,' observed Torres, dropping his voice as everyone else did. 'She grows handsomer every moment. I wonder how the Major managed that? Do you notice it?'

Lennox Peyton did not reply. He was still wondering who this Major Torres,

who was some sort of cousin of Marmaduke Torres, might be, and listening to the various remarks which were being made around him.

But his friend spoke again.

'My cousin Florence Dromere told my mother that there is some mystery connected with the picture. It is said that the Major's model was a young lady: only no one can make out who she is. Florence insists that the Major is over head and ears in love with her without knowing it—and certain to marry her, although he is a confirmed bachelor. It is no wonder if he is in love with her: for she is certainly awfully handsome.'

The quick ears of more than one bystander had been listening to what he said; and a moment later Lennox Peyton heard a voice remark,

'I should not care to be the man who married her. There is a fatality of some sort hanging about that girl.'

And Lennox Peyton, scarcely conscious of the things his friend was saying at his side, thought,

'A fatality of some sort!—Mysteries, and still more mysteries; and a fatality, perceptible even to strangers in her painted portrait! Only—"Neglected." That is an aptly chosen name for the picture. But how came the artist to know?'

Marmaduke Torres was again speaking.

'She reminds me of some one, Peyton.'

Lennox Peyton was in an instant all attention.

'Some girl whom I have seen somewhere.'

'Where?' asked Peyton.

'I cannot remember. But I seem to recollect having seen a girl—something

like that—somewhere. Only girls are all so much alike.'

Lennox was again silent. Marmaduke Torres had always had, ever since Peyton had first made his acquaintance, so many recollections of 'girls whom he had seen somewhere.' It was another peculiarity of his that he invariably discovered all these girls whom he remembered 'so much alike.'

At last they moved away from the picture.

'Tell me what you think of it, Peyton; something artistic, you know. I am not good at that sort of thing,' said Torres, as they left the lady in amber behind them.

'A striking bit of work, with a clever adjustment of lights and shades.'

'Is that all?'

'Oh, I would not say that.'

It struck Torres that his friend did not seem to have come to any very distinct conclusions about the artistic qualities of the painting. He regretted it, for he had been relying a little upon hearing some remarks from Lennox Peyton that should suggest what he might himself becomingly say when called upon to talk about Major Torres's much discussed picture. He could conclude only that, like himself, Lennox Peyton had been too much impressed to be able, at the moment, to exercise his critical faculties.

'Now we are here, shall we look at some of the other pictures?' he suggested.

'If you like.'

The impression made upon Peyton by the picture appeared to have obliterated for the moment any recollections of his errand to Bond Street.

When they had looked at one or two other paintings, in a very perfunctory fashion, Torres suggested,

'This does not seem very amusing, does it? Let us just have another look at "Neglected," and then go.'

They came back to the picture; again waited their turn to look at it; again stood for some minutes before it.

'I must come and look at that again,' remarked Torres, as they turned away. 'That is a girl not like all the other pictures of girls that one sees.'

On the way to the turnstile he suddenly stopped.

'I remember!' he said. 'Of course it was on the river—six or seven years ago.'

'What?'

'That I saw a girl just like that—or rather like that—only she was younger.'

'Whereabouts on the river?' inquired Peyton, as they walked on. He appeared to be interested.

'Between Goring and Pangbourne. Did I never tell you? That was a bit of an adventure. Between ourselves I behaved rather well on the occasion. Look here, Peyton, come and dine with me: and I will tell you all about that. Don't say you cannot come. You can just as well dine with me as by yourself, you know, and I am all alone. Besides, you will be amused to see my quarters. I am not at home. Mother is having the house done up from basement to attic whilst she is away, and it is all painters, paper-hangers, upholsterers, and all the rest of it: not a place in which to stand upright anywhere —don't you know?'

Lennox did know. He had the distinctest recollection of Mrs. Torres as an ami-

able, rather weak old lady, accustomed to spoil her only son Marmaduke, and delighting in turning her house upside down 'for cleaning' as frequently as possible.

Meanwhile his friend continued,

'I am putting up for a day or two at the Major's rooms. He is out of town. You will see his studio, and all the rest of his quarters. And we will have a jolly evening. Do come. I am going to take a hansom. We will drive round together to the places where you want to go. That will save your time. You will come, won't you?'

Again Lennox Peyton assented. But this time the opportunity of seeing the rooms occupied by the unknown Major Torres did more to decide his consent than the warmth of his friend's invitation. Though it was seldom that he could persuade himself to disappoint the friendliness

with which Marmaduke Torres pressed him to give him the pleasure of his society.

'Only I must send a wire to the people with whom I am staying to tell them I shall not be in to dinner,' he said.

CHAPTER III.

Dinner was over, and Marmaduke Torres and his guest had adjourned to a small room attached to the Major's studio; a picturesque little snuggery that had in one corner a long, low window of small greenish and blueish glass, with a deep window-seat beneath it. An egg-shaped Venetian lamp, hanging from the ceiling, shed through the coloured sides an imperfect light that mingled with the last rays of the summer evening stealing in at the window, to illumine faintly the shadowy room's darkly-tinted walls, panelled

partly, and partly hung with draperies of bizarre patterns. Fitfully discernible in the background were, in a corner, a piano, in another a heavy cabinet of wood with brass knobs and hinges, and sombre, quaintly-bound books, and above it the tarnished frame of a dark oil-painting, and elsewhere, in confusion, pictures and bronzes, engravings, 'studies,' and quaint pottery; on the polished floor Persian carpets and skins of wild beasts, and a couple of small palms; and over the hearth (tiled and furnished with old brass dogs) some dark construction of oak with dim mirrors and Bohemian glass. The room contained but little furniture, all of it quaint and uncommon.

'This sort of thing does not look as if the Major was a poor man, does it?' remarked Torres, offering his guest a light. 'You would not expect to hear him ever-

lastingly saying that he cannot afford this and cannot afford that: cannot afford to marry and cannot afford to do anything else that he likes.'

'Unless his expensive tastes keep him poor,' suggested Peyton.

'Ah, you might well say that. You should see the little dinners he gives here—or the way in which he lives himself. He keeps the table of an epicurean.'

'Still he has also some of an epicurean's higher tastes,' remarked Peyton. 'This is a rare Rembrandt, and must have cost him a lot of money.'

He had taken up a framed etching that stood on a little easel on one of the tables. Marmaduke Torres came to his side and looked at it with him.

'That is really valuable?' he asked.

'Very.'

'Ah, then I suppose that is how he

spends his money. I had fancied it was mostly in victuals and drink,' observed Marmaduke Torres, in the tone of a man whose acquaintance with the value of objects of art was limited. 'However, I suppose that now his pictures will begin to bring him in something handsome.'

'Have you known him long?' asked Peyton.

'I have heard of him—in a vague way; but never met him till a week or two since. Won't you sit down?'

Placing himself in the window-seat, and lighting a cigar, he recommenced:

'All this time I have never inquired after your people, Peyton. All well, I hope?'

'All, thank you, except my mother. You know she is a great invalid.'

'Where are they all now. Not with you in town?'

'No: I am staying with friends. The

fact is there are one or two things that I wish to read up at the Museum, and these good folks were kind enough to invite me to stay with them whilst I did so. I do not join my own people until the end of next month.'

'Then you are as hard at work as ever. I wish I was like you, Peyton; able to grind away at books and all that. You are a wonderful fellow, Peyton.'

His admiration for his friend's studious habits was as old as the school-days, and rather increased with time than diminished.

'I am afraid I am nothing of the kind,' replied Lennox Peyton, with a little smile; and continued, 'My people are all in Devonshire at Belmont, this new place which father has taken. The medical men have advised a complete change of scene for mother, and a rather milder climate.'

'Your mother has not become consumptive, I hope?'

'No. It is not that. But nobody seems to know exactly what ails her. Some of the doctors say one thing, and some another; nervous debility, general atony—I cannot tell you what else. We never arrive at anything definite, and, on the whole, I am afraid she grows weaker. This is the last suggestion that she should try a southern English climate and complete change of scene. Then father heard of this place, and took it. All the arrangements have been made very hurriedly, and I have not yet been down there.'

'Do they like the place?'

'Very much. From what my sister writes I imagine that it must be exceedingly pretty, and the house is just what father wished. You know I seldom hear from him. It was built some fifty or sixty

years ago, by a man who had been advised to take his wife to this same part of England, and seems to be very comfortable. The neighbourhood is charming, they say. In fact, father is so pleased that since he has been down there he has been even thinking of purchasing.'

'Indeed! Where is the place?'

'It is a rather out-of-the-way locality, between Totnes and the moor.'

'It must be somewhere near where my father was killed,' said Torres, pensively. 'I have never been in that part of the country.'

A short silence ensued. Lennox Peyton hesitated to make any observation respecting the death of his friend's father.

Mr. Torres had been murdered.

The whole history of the crime, committed some twenty-three years before,

was of a hideous atrocity. Happily its details are by no means essential to the present history. The murderer was a gentleman of moderate wealth, and an intimate friend of Mr. Torres, and the occasion of their quarrel—in the background of which, of course, was a woman—was almost equally discreditable to both sides. Mr. Torres, not suspecting treachery, was induced to visit a sequestered country-house, disappeared, and after some ten days was discovered to have been murdered. The murderer, his name was Chevalier, all but escaped detection, and was suddenly arrested when despair of any light being ever thrown upon 'The Wold Mystery' had become universal. But Chevalier having been once arraigned the whole of the horrible story was at once unravelled, and a confession made—almost in bravado, it seemed—on the eve

of execution, completed what had been previously wanting in its ghastly details. When Chevalier was executed, the sense of being rid of a monster appeared to be shared by all.

Or by all but two—if two are worth mentioning as an exception among so many millions. That morning two miserable women sat by a low fire in a semi-detached house, weeping, poor souls, and wringing their hands. One was a widow, the mother of the condemned man, her only son. The other was his wife, so soon also to become a widow, and about afterwards to be a mother.

The elder woman wept in silence. The sun of her hopes had utterly set. She sat, merely wiping away the tears as they chased each other down her cheeks, and thinking how she once had nursed a little

baby at her breast. The other could not contain her sorrow, and wailed amid her tears,

'What shall I do for my poor baby? Where will there be in the whole world a place for my baby—his child? What shall I do when I see people looking at the child?'

There was a clock in the room that ticked as its hands hurried on to an hour. The elder woman never once raised her regard to it, but the eyes of the younger questioned it every few seconds amidst her tears and wails.

Only ten minutes—and then! Only eight minutes—and then!

Suddenly she rose, and going to the clock stopped it.

The elder woman looked up, hearing the ticking cease, but said nothing. And the younger woman sat down again with a

sort of numbed easement that at least she did not know the hour. Till a clock striking in the next house told it her.

But the world never knew anything of those two women's agony; and was only well satisfied that in one instance justice had been done. By this time only a few people here and there, now and then, remembered the murder of Horace Torres by his friend Edmund Chevalier as 'a horrible story.'

Because it was so horrible a story, Lennox Peyton avoided a reply to his friend's remark; and after a minute observed, to change the subject of their conversation,

'You were going to tell me something about a girl you met on the river, of whom Major Torres's picture reminded you.'

'So I was. I am glad you have mentioned it.'

The speaker's tone suggested that the interruption of his thoughts was welcome. Knocking the ash off his cigar he moved, and, placing himself in the attitude of a man who has a tale to tell, began:

'I am afraid it is rather a long history: but if you would like to hear it——'

'I should very much like to hear it.'

'Well, then. This was in the autumn. It was—let me see—between six and seven years ago: during my first year at Oxford. You know that I resided one year, and was then abroad for two.'

'With your uncle who died in Italy. I know.'

'It was towards the end of the "long." Mother was in town, and I was amusing myself with paddling down from Oxford to Kingston in a desultory sort of way, generally putting ashore in the afternoon near the station, and, after dining, running

up to town by one of the late trains. If I felt in the humour, I came back to my boat to continue my voyage the next day: or I let a day or two pass, just as I felt disposed. That afternoon I must have started from somewhere above Wallingford. I do not remember where. Very likely I did not get afloat till after luncheon. When I set out, I never had any definite plans about how far I would go. I left that to chance. One can easily get back to town from any place on the river. If I felt inclined to exert myself, and had a favourable wind, I did a good many miles in the day: and if I was lazy I merely drifted.'

Lennox Peyton smiled. The plan on which this voyage from Oxford to London was conducted accorded with the narrator's way of carrying out most of his enterprises.

Seeing his smile, the other broke into a light laugh.

'That was like me, was it not, Peyton! You see, I was not intended by nature for going through things all at one stretch like men of your serious, resolute sort. I prefer a little diversion to break the monotony. And I fancy most people agree with me. But this is not my story. There were few boats on the water because the sky looked nasty, though at times the sunshine was bright and pleasant. Only, as the afternoon wore on, a lot of ugly, inky clouds gathered. The wind began to blow in queer little puffs, and several showers of rain came down, in big drops. I remember that at Cleve Lock I told the lock-keeper that I should go on as far as Goring. After that, the rain stopped again; and then I took it into my head that I would paddle on steadily and get down to Pangbourne. At Goring they recommended me not to attempt it, but, you see,

Pangbourne is only about four miles further down. That was no great distance; so I paddled on. But by the time I reached the railway bridge the wind backed, and the rain came down steadily. I thought of returning to Goring, but gave that up; because I should have had the stream against me, and the river was running rather strongly. It seemed better, after all, to go on down stream. Accordingly I stuck to my sculls, working steadily. But the wind continued to freshen, until it became a sort of gale which howled amongst the rushes. The surface of the river was seething like a cauldron, and the rain came down in sheets, torrents, cataracts. I soon had a nice little cargo of water in the bottom of the boat; and then, to make everything pleasant, it began to grow dark. Still I was determined that I would reach Pangbourne somehow. I put

the boat ashore, got the water out, and then paddled on again. By that time it was as nearly pitch dark as it can be on the water. You know one always seems to be able to see a little on the water, no matter how dark it may be.'

He rose, and continued his story leaning against the old cabinet.

'Well, that was a nice sort of evening for boating, was it not? And, of course, I was crawling along at a snail's pace. Still, I stuck to it. I *can* stick to a thing when I choose, Peyton, as well as any man; and by that time I had vowed to myself that I would somehow get the boat down to Pangbourne: though after all I did not do it. That was because all of a sudden there occurred about the last thing anyone could anticipate. I had paddled but a very little farther, when I heard

ahead of me a voice, a thin voice, like a boy's, singing out through the gloom,

'"Look ahead, sir."

'For an instant I wondered whether it was some one on the bank, warning me that I was sculling into the bushes, which I might easily enough have done: then, whether I was farther down the river than I supposed, and near some landing-stage: only I could see no lights. At last I descried a small boat coming towards me with some one in it who seemed unable to control the craft in the rain and wind. The next moment we collided, the bow of the other boat shooting under my scull and outrigger.

'I laid hold of the boat to steady us both, because I did not wish to add a capsize to my other adventures. Then I

looked over my shoulder, to ascertain the precise state of the case.

'In the other boat was a slight, smallish figure, struggling helplessly with an entangled scull, apparently some boy.

'"Hulloa, Tommy," I said, "cannot you get clear? What is it?"

'"My scull is jammed," answered the thin voice.

'"Try to back," I said, "and I'll back too. Can't manage it? The rain gets into your eyes, eh?"

'I could not help laughing at the urchin with the rain lashing his face, which he was trying to avert from it; and I remarked,

'"Hold on to my boat whilst I give you back the scull."

'Tommy, as I had been calling him, caught hold of the gunwale of my boat, and then I noticed on the wrist that lay

across my outrigger—a couple of gold bangles.

'The occupant of the boat was not a boy, but a girl—a young lady!

'I was a good deal surprised, and began an apology.

'All she answered was,

'"It does not matter. Can you give me my scull now?"

'I shipped her scull for her, and she let my boat go, saying,

'"Thanks. I am all right now. I beg your pardon for running into you. The wind was so strong I could not turn my boat."

'I still had hold of her boat, for I was wondering how she came to be out in such weather, and what I could do to help her.

'At last I fancied I understood what had happened, and said,

'"You have missed your landing-stage, and cannot get ashore?"

'"I don't want to get ashore," she answered at once. "I am all right now."

'"But you can't go on in this weather. Only look at the water in your boat!"—She had a lot more water in her boat than I had.—"It is dangerous."

'"Yes, that is just it," she answered.

'"You don't want to be capsized?"

'To that she gave no answer.

'"Let me advise you to put your boat ashore," I said. "You can leave it on the bank. You need not be afraid of anyone's taking a scull in it to-night. And we can send some one to fetch it.—I'll come ashore with you, if you like, and help you to land your boat, and to find your way."

'At that she seemed to think; then, after a moment, looking at me, she said,

'"I'll go ashore if you will promise to take care of me."

'"Certainly," I answered. "Let us look out for a place where we can land."

CHAPTER IV.

'We had a little trouble to find a convenient landing spot, but we discovered one at last, and together pulled up the boats on the towing-path. The wind was still blowing a hurricane, and the rain pouring in torrents. We were both as wet as if we had been capsized, and the girl, with her boating flannels clinging about her, looked piteous. When I had taken the sculls on my shoulders, she asked,

'"Which way do we go?"

'I told her Pangbourne was the nearest place, and proposed that we should go

thither. Without making any remark, she turned at once in the direction I indicated.

'I offered her my arm, and she accepted it, and trudged along at my side, bending her head to avoid the rain that beat in her face. Now and then I spoke to her, to keep up her courage, but she seldom answered. Only, once, when I apologised for the discomforts of our walk by saying, "I am afraid this is a miserable walk for you," she surprised me by replying, "I cannot be more miserable with you than I am at home." As a fact, we were having anything but an agreeable walk. The towing-path is at no time a pleasant promenade after dark, and had become a perfect misery of pasty mud, whose stickiness threatened to rob both of us of our boating-shoes. Here and there it was varied by big puddles, through which we splashed recklessly. It was impossible for

us to be wetter than we were. I was glad for both our sakes when we at last descried the lights of Pangbourne, and reached one of those little water-side hotels of the better sort that are so numerous near the river. I quite forget now what the house was called. I am not boring you, Peyton?'

'On the contrary, you are interesting me very much.'

'Then light another cigar: my story is not yet finished. Its really dramatic incidents remain yet to be told.'

Lennox Peyton lighted a new cigar, and his friend again sitting down resumed:

'I took the girl into the hotel, persuaded her to have some negus, which she at first refused; ordered myself a stiff glass of grog; and, having made arrangements for some one to see to the boats, rejoined my companion, whom I found sipping her

negus alone. I had felt a delicacy about asking her questions, how she came to be on the water, where her home was, and all that. You see, that was not exactly my business. Besides, the circumstances of our walk had not favoured conversation. And I could hardly say that I had properly seen her. Now that I at last got a good look at her in the gas-light, I was surprised to discover how handsome a girl she was.

'I need not attempt to describe her. You have only to recollect that picture of the Major's. I don't say that the girl was exactly like that. She was a good bit younger than that girl we were looking at this afternoon. She seemed to me not more than sixteen. And she was by no means so perfectly, so idealy handsome. You will say, "Of course not, if she was

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only a child." But women never are as handsome as pictures, Peyton—unluckily. Still I should not be at all surprised if that girl had grown up into something very like the Major's picture. In fact, I cannot help thinking that the Major must somehow have come across her. Anyhow, she was uncommonly like the jealous lady, and a remarkably handsome young girl.

'I asked her if she was feeling any warmer, to which she answered, "A little," and, whilst I was having my grog, I coaxed her into drinking the rest of her negus, which I was sure she wanted. Whilst doing so, she turned abruptly to me, and said,

'"I ought to tell you why I was on the water. I came out because it was dangerous. I wanted to let my boat go over the lasher—whilst no one could see me in the dark: and to be drowned—because I

can't bear the life I lead at home any longer. Only the wind blew me up the stream. It was so strong that I could not manage the boat."

'"You ought to feel very much obliged to the wind," I remarked.

'To that she replied, "I don't mind, if you will take care of me."

'She had said something like that before. And you will see presently that I had not understood her. I did not understand her this time either, and wondered a little what she meant. Only I imagined that she was so wet and wretched that she was not thinking much about what she was saying.

'But presently when I began to talk about what we should do, meaning that she should tell me where she lived, and how I should take her home, she surprised me by saying,

'"I don't care. Only don't treat me like they do at home."

'There was something in the tone of the statement that made me look at her, and ask myself how this adventure was going to end.

'However, I explained myself; said that I was sorry that she was not happy; talked about a chill, and so on, you know; and that I thought that, after all, at any rate to-night, she had better go home.

'She cut me short at once.

'"I am not going home," she said, flatly.

'"But what will you do, then?" I asked.

'She looked up at me, and said, as if it was the simplest thing in the world,

'"I am coming with you. You promised to take care of me."

'"But I am going up to town," I answered.

'"I don't mind," she said. "I will come to town with you."'

The speaker rose and took a turn up and down the room. Lennox Peyton, with his elbow rested on the arm of his deep arm-chair, followed him with his eyes. He had been smoking slowly, whilst following every word of his friend's narrative with an attention that proved his interest to be intense. How he seemed to await what would follow in breathless suspense.

The other dropped into the window-seat.

'I do not want to represent myself as better than other men, Peyton,' he observed, apologetically. 'I took a good look at her. She was watching me as if she was feeling not at all flattered by my hesitation. She looked like an uncommonly pretty morsel of perversity—there

was no denying that. And, you see, she was rather throwing herself at me, wasn't she? And I wondered what would happen if I did take her to town with me. To help me along, she remarked just at that moment,

'"You can do what you like with me. I don't care. When you are tired of me you can shoot me; or I'll kill myself. I don't care what becomes of me."

'If you were to ask me how it was that I did not say, "All right, come along then. We will go to town together," I'm afraid I cannot tell you, Peyton. Only, somehow, I felt sorry for the poor little devil. She was not so very little either; a tall, well-made girl, though her figure was slight. And she was evidently a lady. I could not help fancying that she had been brought up in some careful home, and had not the faintest notion of what

she was saying. Only, it was plain that I must use tact in dealing with her. This wild enterprise of putting her boat over the lasher in the dark had exalted her sensibilities beyond all possibility of control.

'"Let us think," I said. "There is no train for an hour or so. I am afraid you are worried. I don't like to hear you say that you don't care what becomes of you. Look here, I am going to light a pipe: have a cigarette, it will do you good.'

'She looked a little surprised, but almost at once held out her hand, saying,

'"I have never smoked. But I will if you wish it. I'll do anything you like, if you will only take me with you."

'I gave her a very mild cigarette, telling her to smoke it in little puffs, very slowly, and to put it down as soon as she was tired of it. Then I lighted my pipe.

'Well, my lady puffed away at her cigarette, as I had bidden her. When she was half way through it, I asked her if it was nasty, and she replied, "Not at all." I could see that she was already more collected. The blessed weed was exerting its benign influence! Presently she put it down, saying, very composedly,

'"I won't smoke any more, if you don't mind."

'I replied that I did not wish her to smoke any longer than she liked: and then, perceiving that she was evidently recovering her sober senses, began to talk reason to her. First I invented some excuses for our not starting at once for town; and presently told her plainly that I wanted her to let me take her home. At first she did not like that at all. But she was a great deal calmer than she had been before she had smoked the cigarette, and

by degress I persuaded her. Still she told me that I might just as well have let her be drowned: and said, with just such a flash in her eyes as that woman has in the picture,

'"I would not have come with you if I had known that you were not going to do anything to help me."

'Howbeit, at last she agreed to go home. She mentioned a point from which she knew her way, if I would take her thither, and having made some enquiries about the road, I set out with her. It was still raining, but not so heavily, and the wind had dropped. That did not mend the road which was dark and dirty; and the distance proved a good deal longer than I anticipated. The girl would not again take my arm. When I offered it, she declined it saying, "No, thank you," in a tone that gave me pretty plainly to under-

stand that she did not think very much of me. Also we did not seem to have a great deal to say to each other, and presently I discovered that she was crying,—after the fashion of all girls in general. It is a pity that none of them can manage to be different from the rest.

'By and by we reached cross-roads. There she stopped, and said,

'"I know my way now. I need not trouble you to come any farther."

'I was wondering whether she would shake hands. Now that we were going to part, I was rather sorry to leave her, and ventured to ask,

'"When I come down for my boat, may I come and see you?"

'To which she replied,

'"What for?"

'"I should like to see you again."

'To that she answered on the spot,

'"If you wanted me, you should have taken me with you."

'"At least you will tell me your name," I proposed.

'She shook her head.

'"But I have only to find out whose the boat is," I remarked, "and I can easily discover your name."

'To which her ladyship replied,

'"If you do that, you will be a cad."

'That was pretty straight, was not it?

'So I offered my hand, and wished her good-night. She looked at the hand, said good-night curtly, with a little bow, and turned away. I stood watching her till she disappeared. I had some thoughts of following her, and seeing whither she went. But I reflected upon that extremely apposite remark of hers, "If you wanted me, you should have taken me with you," and abstained from pursuing her, return-

ing instead to the hotel. I have since sometimes wondered whether she, after all, let her boat go over the lasher on a dark evening. If she did, she certainly had not much for which to thank me. And, Peyton, to this hour I have never been able quite to make up my mind whether I on that evening behaved like a hero—or an ass.'

Lennox Peyton, still seated in the same position, made no offer to give his opinion on the subject.

'It was a bit of an adventure, was it not? Only the girl's crying at the conclusion, like they all do, rather spoiled it. I should have thought a lot more of her if she had not blubbered.'

'Have you seen her since?'

'Never: nor heard a syllable about her. Only it seems that, at any rate, she has not drowned herself. Major Torres must have

run up against her somewhere. So close a resemblance could not be the result of mere accident.'

'Although all girls are so much alike?' suggested Peyton.

'They are not all quite alike in everything: and he has hit off that girl's face, and figure, and expression line for line, and trait for trait: only she is a little older. And, of course, she would be older. I must find out from him where he saw her.'

'When you do,' said Lennox Peyton, 'tell me. I should like to hear who she is.'

Lennox quitted his friend early in the evening, though the latter was urgent with him to remain a little longer.

On his way back to his friends' house his step was slow, the loitering pace of

a man deeply preoccupied with his own thoughts.

For he also had recognised the lady in the picture entitled 'Neglected.'

The jealous girl in amber was a portrait of his own sister.

And Rosamond—that was her name—was neglected: if any girl was. Whilst as for the jealousy which the public had discovered in the features of the lady numbered 104—though no mention of that passion was made in the Academy catalogue—he feared that it could scarcely surpass that of which he too well knew his sister to be capable. Only, how came this Major Torres, of whom he had never heard until to-day, to have painted so characteristic a portrait of her?

Rosamond had been in London during the spring, but her letters to himself, always frequent, had contained no mention

of any artist acquaintance, much less a hint of having sat to anyone.

The affair was a mystery: one more mystery to add to all the others that constituted his own and his sister's strange lot.

Was Rosamond also the heroine of Marmaduke Torres's history of the river?

He feared that it was possible she might be. She was at times so unhappy. She had none of his resources; none of his ability to submit to circumstances.

His reflections were interrupted by his being accosted by some one whom, being lost in his own thoughts, he had not observed approaching him.

This was a man of about seventy, of a medium height, plainly dressed in a pepper and salt walking suit, and wearing a soft, grey felt Homburg hat, and dark blue tie. He was stoutly built, and hale, with brown

hair that had not yet become entirely grey. About his wide temples he was bald. A thick moustache and beard, greyer than his hair, and not long, but bristly, and growing close against his cheeks, and also about his chin, covered all the lower part of his face. His nose approached the Socratic type—an undeniably ugly nose, turned up a little at the point, and broad at the base. Some very good-hearted men have noses like that. To atone for it, his grey eyes, well opened, and not yet sunken, had the soft, gay light of a happy and wise old man. But the charm of his face lay in his mouth, and when a man has a mouth of that sort, it is a patent of the nobility of the life which he has led, and of the soul which dwells in him.

'Did not know me, Lennox?' asked the old man, in a cheery voice.

'Mr. Jaffray! I beg your pardon.'

'I should think so. Cutting your own godfather!'

The old man enquired after Lennox's father, his sister, his mother. The mother came last, and then Lennox Peyton asked,

'And what brings you to town, Mr. Jaffray?'

'Destiny, Lennox. I am spending the night in town because I was going into Wiltshire, and missed the train.'

'That is always so annoying.'

'Annoying! If people are so foolish as to allow themselves to be annoyed. And of what use is it if they do? The *Parcae*, you know, manage these things—or mismanage them; and the philosopher accepts their arrangements, as they come. What are you doing?'

Lennox explained his reasons for being in town, as he had done to Marmaduke Torres, adding,

'You see I must read hard now. After my first in moderations, the college will expect me to take a first in the final schools: besides, I hope I have a chance of a fellowship.'

'Good. You will get it—if it is your destiny. I hope you may get it. Work as hard as you can. And if you do not get either your first or your fellowship—it is all fate, my boy, so do not distress yourself. One of these days, if the sisters three (old cats, Lennox,) permit, I shall look in to see you all in your temporary home, when I am in that part of the world. You will not be at home, you say, until July?'

'Not until the latter end of July.'

'I shall not forget.'

Bidding Lennox, when he next wrote, to send his kind regards to his father and mother, and his love to Rosamond, the old man shook hands, and Lennox proceeded on his way, soon dropping back into his previous train of thought.

But the meeting with Mr. Jaffray had given those thoughts of his a new turn. It was perhaps pardonable that he should not attach much weight to the old gentleman's amiable fatalism. It never appeared to him that Mr. Jaffray himself attached much weight to it. Only it was undeniable that fatality sometimes appeared to be the only possible explanation of the universal puzzle of existence. Was there, hidden somewhere, a thread of destiny determining the lines upon which his life and his sister's had always moved; some doom which, if he could know it, would explain the mysteries that surrounded them?

The speculation contained attractions for a mind like his, of a pensive and melancholy turn.

CHAPTER V.

The evening hour was a perfect example of summer's softest mood. The sun had dropped to the crown of the elms, and the level light swept across the lawns in glowing tides of long-shadowed enchantment. Against it the trees stood out in masses of brilliance and shade. In the air not a breath stirred. Only the occasional voice of the birds broke the leafy stillness of the woods.

Through one of the tall windows of the drawing-room, opening on the long western verandah, a young girl stepped out.

A slender figure, above the middle height, in a costume that becomes the long lines of her girlish gracefulness. Little, narrow feet that plant themselves firmly on the verandah's pavement of black and white marble diamonds. Lightly poised on her jet black hair a broad-leafed hat with a large feather that lends importance to her carriage of conscious dignity.

Not so fascinating here in the wide, level evening lights as in her low dress of amber silk in Major Bob Torres's picture on the walls of the Academy! Or is it the privilege of art to fix for ever one consummate moment, reached in reality but for a single instant in a lifetime?

Still a handsome girl, and at any rate possessed of one characteristic—probably *the* one which any girl would covet most

of all those which the Major's picture presented—that her beauty is of a kind to grow upon anyone discerning enough to study it.

A degree of discernment which no person of the opposite sex had hitherto evinced.

There was no fire of jealous light in her large, darkly liquid eyes this evening, only a certain restlessness, as she looked about the verandah on the right and left of her.

In her hands she had two pairs of gloves. One pair she laid on a small iron table near her. She began to draw on the others.

When they were buttoned, she again cast a regard around her, on the right and the left, over her shoulder, through the open windows of the drawing-room, and across the lawn. As she did so a petu-

lant, aggressive ray lighted up beneath her long fringed lids.

Unable to discover the person whom she sought, she descended the two steps from the verandah to the lawn, and, turning her face to the house, lifted her eyes to one of the upper windows, and called,

'Eleanor!'

No one answered. The girl's eyes fell to the grassy carpet at her feet, and a minute, two minutes, passed whilst she seemed irresolute. Then, turning from the house, she strolled away with slow steps across the lawn. As she went she folded the second pair of gloves—a pair of antelope-skin driving-gloves—which she had taken up from the table, and slipped them into her pocket. Quitting the lawn, she chose one of the walks, still sauntering on with the same lingering steps. Where the path began to drop in a gentle incline she

paused for a moment to look at the purple petunias, and again, further on, to pluck from a rose-bush, with many precautions to elude the thorns, a tea-rose which she fastened in the bosom of her dress. Then she fared on again beneath the trees to a more deserted part of the grounds, where her path began to ascend a steep slope, winding in random zig-zags beneath scattered beeches on the skirts of the wood.

On the crown of the hill she had climbed the beeches grew closer together. No longer following the path she strayed onward beneath them, shaping her course in no direct line—her walk had plainly no aim, save that of the pleasure of breathing the summer evening air—only always farther and farther from the house. Here and there in her walk over the soil of fallen leaves she came upon little clusters of fungi, here a smart bevy with tall, thin

stems, and sharp-pointed, oily-looking caps, there a lowlier brotherhood, thick-set, and of dowdily greyish brown, from whose flat heads an ugly scent rose to the nostrils. Pausing a moment, she swept them down with the side of her little foot, uprooting them all, and leaving them scattered and broken on the ground, as if she performed a congenial action in destroying their noisome life. Then she walked on again with her light, elastic tread, carrying her slender form proudly, with eyes wandering carelessly amidst the beauties of the wood, or, where a ray of clear sunlight found its way to her beneath the boughs of the trees, noting the disproportionate length of her shadow going on before her.

Suddenly she turned to her left, crossed the path she had quitted, and, reaching another, followed it until it led her to the edge of the wood at a spot where a semi-

circular wall crowned a tall projecting crag—it bore the name of 'The Eagles' Nest'—and commanded a wide view of the valley. Resting her arms on the granite coping of the wall, she scanned the view.

Below her a wooded hollow. The topmost boughs of the trees in it were many feet below the wall on which she leaned. A wide burn threaded the valley, and the water was plainly audible, tumbling noisily over a weir at the foot of the rocks above which she stood. Lower down the stream flowed more leisurely, chattering over brown stones, loitering about the roots of trees, watering low meads, and stealing a level, devious course to one of the Devonshire rivers.

In that direction the valley (which higher up narrowed abruptly as it receded towards the moors) opened slowly and uncertainly, the sloping hills falling back

irregularly with many undulations and projecting spurs. Here and there were short inland cliffs, where the busy stream that laved their feet had eaten into the sides of the hills. None of them approached the height of this almost perpendicular crag, upon whose summit she stood.

The greater part of the hill sides were under cultivation, for the land was rich; and at this time of the year the fields waved with the ripening grain. But the trees held the hill tops, and here and there, where the primeval forest had not even now been cleared, came down to the water's edge.

In the valley, on one of the projecting spurs of slightly higher ground, a softly rounded knoll, the house she had quitted stood in its miniature park. From here two sides of it were visible, the western front with its wide verandah that looked

almost directly up the valley, and the southern front, seen in long perspective, that commanded a more open prospect where the lower valley turned to the left.

The house belonged to an unlucky period of domestic architecture, and would have been no doubt pleasanter to the eyes had it been built either fifty years earlier or fifty years later, either before the age of stucco or after it. But it stood well on the crown of its little eminence, nestling among shrubs, a building neither too long nor too high. The fine trees about it lent it a peaceful homely look, and made it no ungrateful feature in the landscape.

As the girl scanned it, and the scene around it, the noble trees, the widening valley unfolding itself in varied picturesqueness, the leafy gorge, the ripening harvest of grain, a straggling village that gave life to the middle distance, and, in

the opposite direction, wooded or cultivated hills that folded over one another for miles and miles until they were closed by the violet-hued, high grounds of distant moors, she felt herself compelled to admit,

'The place is pretty, a secluded, picturesque corner of the world.'

Then she mused,

'Possibly that is why papa is purchasing it; because it is so pretty and secluded. Yet what strange things have happened near here!'

Her face grew thoughtful, and a shade of discontent crossed her eyes.

'Unless Eleanor has something to do with it.'

A long time she stood motionless scanning the panorama before her, absorbed with her own thoughts, whilst she dreamily measured the distances; pensively regarded the play of the sinking light on the

hill-sides, on the standing grain, on the deep summer green of the trees; wondered, in her ignorance, of the relative values of money and acres, what was the price her father would pay; and then, raising her eyes, noticed the effects of the movements of the upper air, dispersing the woolly masses of clouds that began to take lines of crimson and gold.

Below her, the rushing water made soothing music, around the still air was broken by the chirp of humble songsters, or a beating of rapid wings.

Only something rankled in her breast, shutting out the spell of the place and hour, and making her features hard and the light in her eyes cold.

'If I could only see how Eleanor is associated with this last scheme of papa's!'

'Why,' so ran on her reflections, 'should Eleanor be connected with papa's purchase

of Belmont? The place is pretty. That is undeniable. And papa is pleased with it. He can well afford to buy things that please him. The doctors say that mamma will be better here—though I see no signs of it. Reason enough for papa purchasing the estate, without Eleanor's being considered.'

'Only Eleanor is always considered,' she replied to herself, immediately. 'She is the source of all our anxieties. Nothing happens here in which Eleanor has no part. I did not suspect that she had had anything to do with papa's startling generosity in giving me those driving-gloves—or I should not have thanked him quite so effusively. I made a pretty goose of myself that time! And she was standing by. How she must have been laughing at me! Oh, how I hate that girl!'

Her little hands clenched, and her eyes narrowed passionately.

'And now, what is papa doing to gratify Eleanor by purchasing Belmont?'

Again her brain became busy with the riddle she had set herself, whilst her eyes watched the shadows lengthening, and the clouds gathering sunset hues.

'Ah!' she said aloud, at last.

The riddle was guessed.

'Of course,' she reflected, 'of course! That is it. Papa will buy the place to make a present of it to Eleanor. When Julia Poynter was with us, and talked about the place her uncle had left her in Sussex, Eleanor was always saying, "How delightful it must be for a girl to have a place of her own; all for her very own." Eleanor has a pretty art of giving 'gentle hints! That is why papa will buy Bel-

mont. And presently we shall all be staying with Eleanor, instead of her staying with us. And she will talk about "My house; my place; my flowers; my trees!" Awful.'

And again she mused,

'How I hate that girl! And have always hated her.'

Hatred is presumably never excusable; but it is certainly sometimes explicable.

Leaning on the stone parapet, Rosamond Peyton carried her thoughts back to the time when her cousin Eleanor had first come to live under her uncle's roof.

Rosamond was at that date a child.

'Your cousin Miss Eleanor is coming to live with your papa, Miss Rosamond,' said nurse, magisterially; 'and it's to be hoped that you will take an example from her.

She is a little lady, Miss Eleanor; not a rude girl like you.'

'Your cousin Eleanor Kirby is coming to live with us, Rosamond,' said Mrs. Peyton, taking Rosamond on her knees, and stroking her black hair whilst she spoke to her with a sort of weary seriousness. 'I hope you will try to copy her, and to leave off being a naughty girl. It would make mother happy to see her dear little girl like Cousin Eleanor.'

Two days later the example arrived; a gentle, little, fair girl, a year or so younger than Rosamond, who, unbidden, put her small arms around her aunt's neck when she kissed her; and then around Rosamond's, and held out her tiny, neatly-gloved hand to her Cousin Lennox with the dignity of a little queen.

'You may kiss Cousin Lennox, too, Eleanor,' said Mrs. Peyton.

Eleanor held up her lips on the spot, but made no offer to put her arms about the lad's neck.

'And won't you give me a kiss?' asked Mr. Peyton, who had fetched her from the railway-station.

Instantly the child turned to him and lifted her little arms to kiss him as she had kissed her aunt.

Rosamond stood on one side, already mistrustful, watching with her dark, quickly-darting eyes all that was taking place.

'See, Rosamond,' said her mother to her, 'how prettily Eleanor gives a kiss when she is asked.'

These were days when Rosamond would neither kiss nor be kissed: and from that moment she hated her cousin.

She was not a good little girl—Rosamond.

Her mother's appeal to her to observe

how prettily Cousin Eleanor gave a kiss when she was asked, was not destined to be the only occasion on which her attention was directed to the unfavourable manner in which her conduct contrasted with Eleanor's.

Soon she was hearing every day, all day, 'Why do you not try to be like Eleanor?' 'See how neat Eleanor always keeps herself; *her* hands are never dirty; nor *her* frock torn; nor *her* hair untidy.' 'Look how nicely Eleanor writes her copy!' 'Listen how prettily Eleanor answers people who speak to her!' 'See how well Eleanor learns her lessons!' 'People love Eleanor because she is good.' 'Eleanor never has to be punished.' 'Look at Eleanor! she is quite shocked to see you stamping, and screaming, and putting yourself into your wicked passions!'

If anything more was wanted, and it

was not wanted, to rouse all the rebel in Rosamond, Eleanor herself unconsciously supplied it, by declining to share in Rosamond's escapades, or to take part in the strange games that entertained the elder girl's imagination. Eleanor would not hide in the garden at lesson-time; nor pick fruit and flowers without leave; nor pretend that brushes and combs and soap could not be found, when Rosamond wished to have an excuse for neglecting her toilet.

'I don't like playing at that game,' she said, when Rosamond wished to enact the beheading of Charles the First with the bill-hook in the stick-house, and an old doll for victim; and gravely remarked, when asked to climb the apple-tree, 'Ladies do not climb trees.'

With all which sentiments nurse heartily agreed. It was, somehow, always Eleanor's way to be always, in the pret-

tiest manner possible, just what people wished to have her.

In fact, the children were ill-assorted companions, and, probably, would never have understood each other under the most favourable circumstances; and the perseverance of the whole household in quoting Eleanor's gentle manner to point a moral for Rosamond's guidance, and the universal chorus of 'Eleanor is good and Rosamond naughty,'—that was painfully true—naturally drove the elder girl into permanent rebellion. If it had been permitted her, she would have shunned her cousin and have amused herself alone, as she had done before Eleanor's arrival. That, however; being forbidden, she submitted to the inevitable, hated her cousin, was bitterly jealous of her, and sulked.

On one occasion, when informed—as she so often was informed—that everyone

loved Eleanor on account of her exemplary behaviour, she replied defiantly,

'No, they don't. I don't love her. I detest her.'

For which she was sent to bed in disgrace. The punishment did not alter her sentiments.

CHAPTER VI.

It may, perhaps, be asked, 'Where were Mrs. Peyton's maternal instincts, that she should pursue with her own child a course that could only exasperate her irritable nature, and aggravate the grave defects in her character, which kindness and careful attention alone could alter?' But, if anyone in the house asked that question, it was Mr. Peyton alone, who was as fully persuaded as anyone else that 'Eleanor was good and Rosamond naughty.'

That was the beginning of the neglect which had made Lennox reflect that Major

Torres's portrait of his sister was at least appropriately named; the first shadow of the mystery which, as he and his sister grew up, overshadowed their lives.

Eleanor, for her part, at no time evinced the smallest aversion for Rosamond. She was a gentle little thing. It is possible, too, that she felt her position of a morally superior being—even the *naïvest* children have a consciousness of approbation—and found it easy to behave forbearingly to 'poor Rosamond,' always more or less in disgrace. Only at times her soft, blue-grey eyes would rest on her cousin with a terribly shocked and scandalised regard; which always made Rosamond furious.

If Rosamond had not been quite so young, the case might have turned out differently. Though she was a naughty little wretch, her character was not without generous traits. That she should hate her

orphan cousin was unfeeling. But she was too young to understand how deeply poor, little, fatherless and motherless Eleanor was to be pitied; or to see how touchingly winning were the pretty manners, the instincts of a little gentlewoman, and the yielding gentleness of the solitary child, who henceforth had to look to the compassion of strangers to replace all the parental tenderness of which death had relentlessly robbed her helplessness. Such considerations are too recondite to have weight with a bread-and-butter nursery miss of eleven who sees a playfellow preferred by everyone before herself.

Rosamond's recollections of those earliest years of companionship with her cousin were the recollections of a little pariah. 'If one is always to be called naughty, one may as well be naughty,' is indisputa-

bly a perverted philosophy; one, nevertheless, that plays a larger part in human conduct than is always suspected; and also appeals with greater force to the imaginations of women than to those of the sterner sex. For some years it was the first article of Rosamond's creed; and if there be any readers of this tale who feel disposed to take Rosamond's part, or to pity her, they may perhaps consider it an evidence of some good traits in the child's nature that the treatment to which she was subjected did not fatally warp her character.

The years stole on, and the girls were both in their teens. Eleanor continued to be 'good,' and Rosamond 'naughty.' Eleanor was still always winning, always obedient and tractable, always what people wished her to be, and invariably bright and happy. But everyone else changed.

Rosamond herself became different. By degrees she was given up as hopelessly incorrigible, and people took less and less notice of her. Yet all the time she was learning a lesson from Eleanor. She learned to exercise a sort of external control over herself—to let her sense of wrongs and injustices rankle in her own breast only: at least not to proclaim it to all the deaf ears about her, and not to lose all her self-control in her fearful rages unless she was more than ordinarily provoked. Also she discovered that to conform her conduct in externals to something like Eleanor's, conduced to her personal comfort; and she acted upon that discovery. Only Eleanor had a knack of doing exactly what she ought to do, which it was impossible to acquire. With the best possible intention of escaping from being perpetually scolded and disparaged, she, Rosamond, could

never help speaking and acting and thinking after a fashion of her own, which lacked that hall-mark of universal approval which stamped all Eleanor's proceedings.

But though, in a fashion, she was thus doing her best, she still found herself ever less and less regarded, and more and more estranged from her father and mother. Mrs. Peyton, always an invalid, had never bestowed much attention upon her children. She seemed to regard them with some secret disappointment. But when Rosamond and her brother were little their father had noticed them a good deal, particularly Lennox. Afterwards the attention he bestowed upon them perpetually diminished. He no longer took them out with him. He had no interest in their prattle. He ceased to chide herself when she was naughty. Eleanor became his companion, and Lennox and

herself merely two children who lived in the house. He was never unkind; never unjust, except in his preference for Eleanor. He seemed even at times to realise her own and Lennox's forlorn lot, but his affection for them vanished, and was replaced by a mere fulfilment of paternal obligations, a cold justice such as not unnaturally appeared to the sensitiveness of a young girl more cruel even than neglect.

All because Eleanor had come to live with them!

After both Eleanor and she had become great girls, another change ensued. Eleanor had come to them penniless, as destitute, poor little thing, of means as of love. But when Rosamond was sixteen, an aunt who had declined to do anything for Eleanor at the date when she had lost her parents, died intestate. The old woman

had some impression that making a will amounted to informing Providence of her readiness to receive notice to quit this vale of tears. In consequence, Eleanor came into about eight-hundred a-year.

The good dame, thus inconsiderately called for by 'gossip Death,' before she had given any intimation of readiness for his visit, had always announced her intention of leaving all her property to a hospital. So no girl was ever made an heiress more unexpectedly. Eleanor's inheritance of a fortune nearly proved the last straw for Rosamond. Already pretty Eleanor Kirby—it was by this time plain that Eleanor would be very pretty—had become a universal favourite, a 'sweet girl,' who won the goodwill and warm affection of all who knew her; and now Eleanor—Miss Kirby everyone began to

call her at once, as if instinctively—was a wealthy girl who could afford to indulge her personal tastes, a future beauty, of whom men talked, an heiress regarded with respect by all the world.

All that made no difference to Eleanor. Her gentle nature adapted itself with equal ease to adversity or prosperity. But it made a difference to Rosamond, who now dropped completely into the background. When the cousin she hated made her presents she dared not refuse, and had no power to return, she could have sunk into the earth for shame.

In that way they reached the last stage, the present situation, the bitterest of all. As the girls completed their teens, Mr. Peyton's interest in his niece doubled. She had grown into an attractive girl in whom a well-read and accomplished man

—Mr. Peyton was both—could interest himself with a purpose. He devoted himself to her; directed her studies; guided her taste; and even himself joined in her higher pursuits.

Then Rosamond began to pay the real penalties of her unlearned lessons and childish naughtinesses. She did not herself immediately perceive the fact, but when the truth at last broke upon her it was all at once and in its full misery. Her brother had come home for his first vacation, having taken a scholarship, and got into a reading set, and he and Eleanor talked together of things which Rosamond found herself completely unable to understand.

Suddenly Rosamond perceived that Eleanor was a well-educated, accomplished girl, a girl whose conversation was of a kind to afford pleasure to clever and cul-

tivated men, a girl in possession of those exquisite treasures of information that make refinement of thought and delicacy of perception; whilst she, Rosamond—well, she could just read and write, and was not always sure of spelling correctly.

That evening she took down from the shelves in the school-room the old grammars and histories, the elementary school-books that Eleanor had long ago outgrown, (she thought of that with shame), the lesson-books whose hated leaves she herself had for the last two years congratulated herself upon being no longer compelled to open, and hid them in her own chamber to be read at night.

In vain! It was too late. Hours of feverish study cannot atone for wasted years. The countless pages of history, French verbs, German substantives, geography, poems and plays, which she at-

tempted to master all at once, only gave her brain a mental indigestion, and left nothing in her memory. And she had no one to help her.

She could remember a day when her brother found her in the library, crying, not for sorrow but for rage.

'It is shameful! shameful! shameful!' she raved, when he was fain to learn the cause of her grief. 'It is not all my fault that Eleanor is admired and accomplished, and I am uneducated. If I had been fairly treated, I could have learned as much as Eleanor. They goaded me into disobedience, as perseveringly as they encouraged her to learn. They have made me a *shame* to my friends and to myself. But it is I that pay all the penalty of the injustice with which I have been used.'

'It is never too late to learn, Rosamond,' said her brother, kindly, with the robust

conviction of that fact enjoyed by the studious set amongst whom he was making himself a place.

He was a man to whom robust convictions were congenial. And he and Rosamond loved each other dearly. They had become passionately attached during the slow years, which for reasons unknown to them had robbed them of the love of their parents.

'It is too late when one has never made a beginning,' returned the girl, almost fiercely. 'You know nothing about it, Lennox. You went to school, and were made to learn. This last month I have tried—you do not know how hard!—that I might be able to be a companion for you and papa, like Eleanor. But I cannot learn. I can only hate that Eleanor.'

Lennox was silent. He did not hate Eleanor. But neither would he defend

her, whilst his sister was thus beside herself with excitement. He understood Rosamond too well, and loved her too tenderly, to be capable of the cruelty of exasperating her fierce resentments.

Since that last bitterest humiliation of conscious inferiority, she had again yielded to necessity, with something even dignified in her angry submission, and had accepted the position in the family prepared for her by her childhood's insubordination, by her ceaseless jealousy of her cousin, by her incapacity to compete with the charms of a universal favourite, and by the neglect with which she had been treated.

Her father took no notice of her. Her mother feared the fierce ebullitions of her uncontrollable temper, rarer, but not less terrible than in her childhood. Eleanor—indignities of indignities!—pitied her. Lennox loved Eleanor, and his father and

mother idolised her: as did everyone else. Eleanor was rich, pretty, well-dressed, clever, accomplished, a favourite, and in request; and she was poor and ignorant, a wild, moodish girl, who was just tolerated.

Only, this summer evening, as she reflected bitterly upon how all that had come about, once more, as on the occasion when her brother found her in the library weeping with rage at her incapacity to learn, the fierce indignation boiled up in her breast.

'It is shameful, shameful, shameful! the injustice that is meted to me! Because I had not the art of winning the love of strangers, the love that was mine by natural right was taken from me. I needed more help than most children, and therefore they gave me none. My passionate nature was a misery to me, and those who should

have been gentle with it, maddened me. I could have been as accomplished as Eleanor. I *could* learn faster than she when I chose. If I had only known! Only, they should have helped me. What child loves its lessons? If they would have given me a few of Eleanor's chances! If I were put into favourable lights—and dressed, only it costs more to do a dark girl justice than a fair one. What have I or my brother done that our parents should hate us?'

She turned away from the parapet, and strolled back to the woodland path, as she concluded,

'And now Eleanor is to have Belmont given her—because she already has everything: I wonder what it will cost? If I were to ask papa to give me one tithe of that money? Fancy my asking papa for anything! He would think I was taking

leave of my senses—and with good reason. Eleanor does not ask. She only makes a *naïve* remark, dear little innocent! and the things are given her. If she does not want them they are handed on to me—like these gloves! I may well detest her! What has she cost my brother and me?'

CHAPTER VII.

The way she took was not that by which she had reached 'The Eagles' Nest,' but another, that sweeping gently to the right would bring her back to the house by a *détour* through the lower parts of the wood. Her path soon descended rapidly, and then rose and fell in an irregular manner with the uneven surface of the ground. Though the woods were not large many a secluded spot of sylvan loveliness lay hidden in them, and the devious path led through more than one such charmed nook: glens where the trees opened and

the greensward appeared soft and verdant carpeting narrow dells: bottoms where a little streamlet, with a wood-ranger's path by its side, slid along close under dripping mossy stones, or purled over the pebbles in the shallows; hollows where giant trees cast their shadows on pools of still dark water, some reflecting the blue sky overhead, and others hidden under interlacing boughs that made perpetual gloom even in summer's highest noon.

The girl gave little heed to the delicate charms of her changeful ways. Her brain was still too busy with the thoughts that had occupied her in 'The Eagles' Nest,' for her to have much attention to bestow upon the scenes about her. Only presently, as her path took a turn in a little hollow, she stopped with a start.

For an instant she was seized with an

apprehension of a conflagration a short distance in front of her.

The spot where she stood lay in deepest shade, beneath an impenetrable canopy of leaves, and, now that the sun had set, the dense gloom in the woods gathered rapidly. Before her, on ground but a few feet higher, were tall beeches, many and near together, like those beneath which, an hour or so since, she had destroyed the noisome fungi. Beyond the beeches, barred by their giant boles of inky blackness, was a glow—of crimson flames, was it?—flames shaded with smoke? The black earth under the trees bordered it below in a line as hard as if drawn with a ruler. Above, the equally black, dense foliage closed it with an uneven fringe, over which the light glowed here and there through the lace-work of leaves.

A fire in the woods? Only there was no sound, nor any smell of smoke.

She understood. Her path had turned abruptly to the north-west. The phenomenon before her was the fierce light above a sunken sun, lingering in the furthest north-west corner of the heavens, the same glow which an hour since had begun to paint the fleeting cloudlets crimson and rose: and the black framing of sylvan gloom was the occasion of its startling effect of lurid brilliance.

A minute or more Rosamond stood regarding the striking spectacle. Strong effects possessed for her the same attractiveness that robust convictions had for her brother. While she watched, the smoky appearance given by darker moving clouds passed away, and the whole sunset deepened to a uniform crimson.

'The sky looks as if it had been turned into blood,' she said to herself.

After a moment, she added,

'Like that awful story of the man at Wold.'

Then she strolled on again. At the edge of the beeches the weirdness of the red sunset glow disappeared. But the whole western heavens were crimson almost to the zenith.

A few yards further, and she stopped again,—this time with an expressive, low 'Ah!'

She was now on the border of a larger dell. Thick forest trees clothed its slopes on all sides, but where the beeches opened the ground sank in narrow sloping lawns, in whose centre lay a large pool, or rather a small mere. Rushes and reeds grew around its sides. At one end rose the ceaseless bubbling of the springs that

filled it. At the other its waters stole away into that tiny brook whose windings she had encountered more than once in her walk.

In the dying rosy light the leafy glade was filled with delicate shadows that, deepening under the trees and slumbering dark on the tremulous waters, only partially yielded their empire to the dim radiance that illumined the mossy lawns, and touched more lightly the higher tufts of sedges and reeds, lending the spot at this hour of nightfall some enchantment of unwonted loveliness.

Lonesome, however, as the spot seemed —a haunt fit for fairies or elves—it had two occupants of flesh and blood, who had been the occasion of Rosamond Peyton's sudden, and expressive, but inaudible, 'Ah!' They also furnished the reason of her now slipping behind the thick trunk of

a tree, beneath whose deep shadow she might safely watch their movements unobserved.

Of the two, one was a young girl, expensively dressed, with fair, wavy hair in heavy masses that seemed to caress her shapely head. She had a delicious figure, gracefully proportioned in softly outlined moulds, and a blonde's beautiful complexion of exquisite grain. Her face was winning, a tender oval of wide forehead, delicately-tinted cheeks, and prettily rounded chin, with a little nose, well-opened grey-blue eyes, sparkling with quick-witted light, and a rosebud mouth whose gentle lips were a marvel of sweetness.

With one look at her any man might understand why she had all the world at her feet.

Her companion was a tall man of fifty or more, who bore himself erectly; a man of striking appearance, with grizzled moustache and hair, and a cold, commanding face that wore a guarded expression. Something he had of the look of a punctiliously just man, but also the air of one who had found his path through life beset with many cares. He presented in no single feature the slightest resemblance to either of his children, Rosamond or Lennox.

For this was Mr. Peyton.

'Papa and Eleanor as usual *tête-à-tête*!' said Rosamond to herself, behind the tree.

A momentary flash of jealousy gave her features an expression not unlike that of the girl in amber whom the authorities of the Academy had numbered '104.'

Eleanor sat not far from where the faint light and the deeper shadows met, on the trunk of a fallen tree. A bough of the tree made her a rest for her elbow, and her head reclined on one of her shapely well-gloved hands. The other hand lay on her lap. Where Rosamond stood she could see how the light played on her fair hair, fell softly with rosy glow on her cheeks of damask, and lit up her sparkling eyes.

Her attitude was one of a gentle repose, and she sat perfectly still. Her eyes alone moved, watching Mr. Peyton as he walked up and down on the turf between her and the pond. Only every now and then she dropped her eyes to the ground, almost immediately to raise them again, and once more to devote herself to watching her uncle's pensive walk. A shade of anxiety revealed itself in her eyes. Plainly some-

thing was amiss, and the situation suggested that the girl was awaiting words that her uncle was indisposed to speak.

Rosamond observed that her father did not look at Eleanor, he might even have been ignorant of her presence, so regardlessly of it did he walk up and down, holding himself erect, but never once raising his eyes from the grass at his feet.

At last he stopped, almost opposite Eleanor, slowly lifted his eyes, and regarded her. She was still looking at him, and their eyes met.

Eleanor smiled, a beautiful smile, the response of a young girl's gentle love.

But she dropped her eyes as she said, in a voice, soft as her smile,

'I ought not to have asked you to tell *me*, uncle.'

'You ought not,' replied Mr. Peyton, in a chill, level voice.

'And I am not trying to *guess*, uncle.'

'I am sure you are not. You are always a good girl, Eleanor.'

Still the same chill voice, though he praised her.

'Not *always*, uncle. Only—*may* I say something?'

To lay a little stress upon one word in her sentences was a trick of Eleanor's. As the words fell in her soft accent from those charming lips, it sounded pretty.

'Only *one* little thing.'

That question was asked because he had not answered.

'Say on: you are a good girl.'

'Might it not be better to tell *some one?*'

'You do not know what you are talking about, my girl,' answered Mr. Peyton,

gently. 'You are a good girl, Eleanor. But—we will never speak of this again.'

'Never, uncle dear: if you do not wish it.'

'I do not wish it.'

The tone of the words, though not unkind, was severe and imperative.

Rosamond wondered what they could have been discussing.

Mr. Peyton turned on his heel and walked on again, and Eleanor fell back into her position of profound repose. Only, as she no longer followed his movements with her eyes, she did not perceive that, instead of coming back when he reached the end of the pool, Mr. Peyton proceeded towards one of the sylvan paths and left her.

He walked in the direction of the house, passing within a couple of yards of Rosamond, who slipped round to the other

side of the tree, so that he should not see her.

Presently Eleanor looked up again, and noticed that he was no longer in sight.

Quickly rising from her seat, she looked around her. For an instant she lifted her eyes to the open sky above, where the rose lights were fast fading, and then seemed to take note of the dense shadows thickening beneath the trees.

But she did not immediately turn in the direction of either of the routes which led to the house. Instead, for a minute, she stood by the brink of the mere, with her fingers interlaced, whilst she regarded the bushes.

'Dear uncle!' she said, half aloud. 'What can it be that makes him so sad?'

Then she directed her steps towards the path which Mr. Peyton had taken some minutes before.

As she quitted the margin of the pool Rosamond also emerged from her place of concealment, and, choosing the same route, sauntered slowly onwards towards the house.

In accordance with her anticipations, but a minute or two passed before she heard her cousin, approaching behind her, call to her:

'Rosamond!'

Rosamond arrested her steps and looked back.

Eleanor joined her. As they walked on together, Eleanor began an apology.

'I am afraid that you looked for me, dear, before you came out.—I am so sorry. Uncle asked me to take a stroll with him, and I *could* not refuse him; he is so kind: and this afternoon he was looking sad—you know—like he does so *often*. I cannot *bear* to see that look in his dear face.

Sometimes I wonder very much what it is that makes him so unhappy, when he is *so* good and kind. I am afraid there is some secret that pains him.'

The remark required no answer, and none seemed to be forthcoming; only, when they had walked some yards, Rosamond observed, bitterly,

'It is possible that a man who has alienated his children from his affections, put a stranger in their place, and bestowed upon her all that was rightfully theirs, may occasionally hear his conscience telling him things that forbid his being entirely at his ease.'

Her companion was silent. She had at once recognised in Rosamond's voice a note only too well known. When Rosamond was in these moods, to pass over her remarks in silence was the only course

possible. Reply of any kind only provoked an explosion of irritability.

Without a word the two girls passed on side by side, under the heavy-shadowed trees, now stepping into gloom so dark that their winding path was barely discernible, and then again emerging into the grey twilight that made the light hair of the younger seem, against the deep shadows, like an aureole about her head. As the ground again rose slightly Rosamond spoke.

'I wanted to talk to you about something.'

Her voice had lost its threatening tone. She was subject to these quick changes of humour, at one instant passionate, and, without any apparent cause, reposeful a moment afterwards. Sometimes the change was in the opposite direction.

'Yes, dear?'

'Do you remember those antelope-skin driving-gloves papa gave me a day or two since: at the same time that he gave you a similar pair: those gloves for which I thanked him so effusively? I made rather a goose of myself, didn't I? You were laughing at me all the time; don't say you were not.'

'*Laughing* at you, dear! What was there to laugh at?'

'You need not pretend that you don't know.'

Her voice was gliding back to its former note.

'But——' began Eleanor.

'It is useless to try to put me off with pretences, Eleanor. I have heard all about those gloves. The lady's-maid told me. Papa had not been suddenly inspired with an idea of making an exactly equal present

to his daughter and his niece: I beg your pardon—his niece and his daughter. The niece comes first. No notion so monstrous as that could ever have occurred to papa: and I ought to have known it. The gloves were originally bought for you. Only, in consequence of some mistake, they were a size too large; and papa was going to change them, when *you* kindly suggested that being too big for you they would do for me—that was in itself a compliment, was it not?—and that, if papa got another pair for you, giving me what you did not want might assist to keep my nasty temper quiet for a day or two.'

'I said nothing about "nasty temper," dear. I thought only that, as uncle was giving me a very pretty pair of gloves, you would be pleased to have a pair like them.'

'You might have said "nasty temper,"

if you like. I have a nasty temper, and one of its peculiarities, Eleanor, is that I don't care to be presented with your cast-off things.'

She was choking with passion, suddenly wrought up to that pitch of excruciating excitement with which girls of a petulant temperament can become possessed about the merest nothings, when they feel their susceptible *amour propre* wounded by a slight.

Anxious to relieve her of her impression of an indignity put upon her, her cousin essayed a further explanation in her gentle reassuring voice. That was, however, soon interrupted.

'Wait a moment, Eleanor,' said Rosamond, incisively. 'Papa all along meant to make me a present—for once to treat you and me alike; and had no mistake occurred, and had you made no sugges-

tion, he would still have given me the gloves? Are you prepared to assert that to be the truth?'

'I did not say that, dear,' began Eleanor.

'You had far better say nothing, Eleanor; unless you wish to make me more angry than I am already.'

That Eleanor certainly did not wish; and therefore held her peace.

Perceiving that, the other continued,

'You see, as I said, the gloves were given me because you did not want them. Well, Eleanor, I do not want them, either. Here they are. Will you kindly take them?'

Whilst speaking, she drew from her pocket her father's unlucky present that had become the occasion of so much wrath, and tendered it for her cousin's acceptance.

'But *I* cannot wear them, dear,' replied Eleanor, in her clear gentle voice.

'Still I think you will take them, please. You have supplanted me in my father's affections, I know; but I have not come yet to wearing your cast-off apparel. Here.'

'Oh, Rosamond dear!' protested the fair girl. 'Why *will* you be so bitter with us all? We want to love you—to make you happier than you are: if you would only let us!'

But Rosamond still held out the gloves, repeating,

'Here, Eleanor.'

Her will was the stronger of the two, and, submitting to it, her cousin accepted the gloves, wondering in herself what she should do with them.

They again walked on in silence. Once more their path descended, and was here through nearly unbroken shadows under interlacing boughs. Soft moss had made a carpet of velvet upon the ground, and

their light tread fell almost noiselessly. Above them, in the topmost boughs, became audible the first whispers of a rising faint breeze of the night.

But again Rosamond spoke.

'So papa is going to make you a present of this place?'

Her cousin turned her eyes upon her with a start. The movement was entirely involuntary, for it was quite impossible to read the speaker's features in the gloom.

'Has uncle told you?' she inquired, with surprise.

And Rosamond said in herself, 'Ah: so I was right.'

Aloud she added,

'No. Papa did not tell me. Would it be likely that he should communicate his secrets to me?'

'But, then—how *did* you know?'

Her accent confessed how vainly her

brain was seeking to imagine any means whereby Rosamond could have been acquainted with Mr. Peyton's private intentions, hitherto confessed to no one save herself; and to her only under strict promises of secrecy. No hint of the ultimate purpose of the purchase of Belmont, so he had informed Eleanor, had been as yet given even to Mrs. Peyton; and his solicitors supposed his only motive to be that the climate of the spot appeared to suit his wife.

Rosamond laughed.

'The discovery demanded no very remarkable powers of penetration,' she observed, with a shade of acerbity. 'Everything that is done in papa's house is done directly or indirectly to gratify you. It was only necessary to enquire what possible advantages you could derive from papa's purchasing Belmont to make a pretty

shrewd guess what was his motive: particularly as you have of late been giving some tolerably obvious hints that you would be amused to possess, like your friend Julia Poynter, a place of your own.'

CHAPTER VIII.

ELEANOR felt the thrust.

Mr. Peyton, also, when surprising her with the announcement of his intention of presenting her with Belmont on her twenty-first birthday, had said something about gratifying a fancy of hers, which had revealed itself in her remarks about her friend's estates. Only his carefully chosen phrases had been so worded as to forbid the possibility of her supposing that anyone had understood the unpremeditated expression of her thoughts as hints of a wish which she desired to have gratified.

Few of her sex could have heard the unmerited imputation of disingenuousness—it was unmerited—without bridling; yet as much of pain as of resentment made itself felt in her instantaneous reply,

'You wrong me, Rosamond: you wrong me *cruelly*. I could not be guilty of such motives as you impute to me. After all these years that we have lived together, you ought to know it. I never *dreamed* of such a thing as uncle's giving me Belmont. I do not myself think that he ought to make me so handsome a present. There is no reason why he should. I have told him so. Only——'

She paused.

'Only you are going to accept it, all the same,' concluded Rosamond for her, in a tone unmistakably sardonic.

The younger girl's sole reply was to draw a little aside from her, so that they

pursued their walk with a yard or more of the path between them.

'If I could only *tell* you the things dear uncle said, Rosamond,' she pleaded, presently.

She was feeling wretched; wounded to the quick, and distressed by a misgiving that, if her conduct was liable to be thus misrepresented, her self-respect must compel her to refuse her uncle's present, although she was well aware how much her doing so would hurt him.

'I can imagine what papa said to you, without your telling me,' rejoined the other, in her angry, jealous voice. 'I have been hearing him say nothing else ever since you came to live with us—papa's dear, loving, winning, graceful, beautiful, clever, accomplished, fascinating, incomparable niece, whose ineffable superiority to his own graceless, uninteresting offspring

has compelled him to transfer all his affections from them to her, and makes it his hourly pleasure to lavish on a stranger all that the laws of nature entitled his children to expect from his hands.'

'Rosamond! Rosamond!' expostulated the younger girl, in accents of distress.

'It is the truth. You cannot deny it.'

'It is *not* true, Rosamond: not as you put it.'

'I tell you it is true,' retorted the elder girl, in a voice of seething passion. 'You have stolen my father's love away from my brother and me. Papa's whole heart is set upon you: of us he never thinks. He shuns us, and dislikes us. Me he despises. He would not have despised me if you had not come between us. If you had never come to live with us, I should not have been put into the background. The things that have been done for you would have

been done for me. My father would have taken some pride in me, and have cared to make me an educated and accomplished girl. I have as much brains as you, my dear; if it comes to that. Then I should have been indulged, and fêted, and admired, and have been my father's companion—and my brother's companion—which it is my right to be, Eleanor, instead of what you have made me, a sort of pariah in my father's house. If you knew all the reasons you have given me for hating you, Eleanor, you would be a little afraid of me sometimes.'

'Rosamond! Rosamond!'

That was all that Eleanor could find to say. Rosamond had no occasion to hint that she might with reason be afraid of her. At the present moment she was shuddering with positive terror at this sudden storm of invective.

But Rosamond went on.

'And now, I suppose, because it is not enough that you have lured all papa's love away from me and my brother—and from mother, too, *even* she is nothing to papa in comparison with you; because it is not enough that papa spends upon you more than the double of what he spends upon all of us together,—now papa's estates are also to become yours, Belmont first—and, pray, are you to have all the old family estates also afterwards? Only of course you will have them, as you are to marry Lennox. One consolation is, that Lennox will get back in that way some part of what papa has squandered upon you: and I, I suppose, shall find myself penniless. I hate you, Eleanor! And, as I tell you, if you would reflect what good reason I have for doing so, you would be a little afraid of me.'

Certainly the tone in which that assertion was repeated was anything rather than reassuring. Perhaps that was the reason why this time Eleanor made no reply of any sort.

Their path had again dipped rather abruptly, and now, from beneath the deep shades under the trees, through which they were passing as if through a tunnel, an archway of light opened at a short distance before them, where their route crossed a bridge with low wooden railings in Chinese zig-zag patterns, that here spanned a deep pond, formed by banking up one of the streams through the woods. Both ends of the bridge were overspread by the boughs of the trees that came down to the water's edge, and hung over it. Only in the middle the water could be seen, dappled with the leaves of water plants, and reflecting in dull leaden

hues the last of the evening twilight.

'I shall tell uncle that he must not give me Belmont,' said Eleanor at last, when they had walked some little way down the descent in silence.

'And explain to him the reason: because it would be an injustice to my brother and to me; he will be all the more resolved that you shall have it. You are clever, Eleanor.'

'Rosamond! How can you say such things of dear uncle?'

'Because they are true. Pray, why are we here?'

'Because the place agrees with aunt.'

'Not at all. She is no better here than she was in Leicestershire. She is weaker: and the change has upset her. Only it is pretended that she is better, because you admired Belmont, and wished to come here.'

'I?'

'You. Did not you first come down here with papa, as soon as he heard of the place? Did not you at once say that it was a beautiful place? and that you would like to live here?'

'It was the medical man who——'

'Who talked about change of scene,' interrupted Rosamond, impatiently. 'But he said nothing about Belmont. The person who was consulted about Belmont was you. You are always consulted: and you always have your choice. When papa had taken Belmont, before any of the rest of us had seen the place, did he not bring you here a second time to choose your room, even before mamma, for whom the place was supposed to be taken, had selected hers? Had you then already thought of getting papa to buy the place for you?'

They had reached the bridge. In the north-west beyond the further end of the pool, where the wood was more open, the last of the crimson sunset glow, low down on the horizon, could be seen between the black trunks of the trees. There was a dim reflection of it on one spot on the water.

'It was dear uncle's thought, not mine,' said Eleanor. 'But I can see that it will not *do* for him to give it me. I shall not accept it.'

'Not accept it!'

Rosamond stopped as she spoke, with her dark eyes fixed upon her companion, as she stood between her and the ruddy light glowing under the trees.

'I could not accept anything that made people think so unworthily of me,' said the fair girl.

What was that light that suddenly

flashed up in Rosamond Peyton's dark eyes?

She was by Eleanor's side, had seized her by one arm, they were against the wooden railing of the bridge, the railing, old and rotten, was giving way, and Rosamond exclaiming, passionately,

'Then don't accept anything else. Instead——'

With a sudden wrench of her lithe arms —she was by far the stronger of the two, and to resist her would have been impossible for the fair girl, even if she had not been taken by surprise—she swung her cousin towards the water.

For a moment Eleanor's fate appeared to be sealed. The water was twenty feet deep, if it was an inch. The railing of the bridge, at which she caught in desperation, broke off in her hand, and fell into the pool with a splash; and the murder burn-

ing in Rosamond's jealous eyes compelled her to avert her face with a cry of terror.

Only, just as she was falling, already herself beyond hope of rescue, she said,

'Tell Lennox I sent him my love.'

Instead of throwing her into the water, Rosamond flung her down on the bridge.

Half a minute she stood looking at her. Then she remarked,

'That was clever, Eleanor. You are clever: there is no denying it. That was about the only thing that could have saved your life. I don't want to be hated by my brother, as well as by all the rest of you. Though what Lennox can have found to love in you, I am sure I do not know.'

Her breast was heaving. Otherwise she seemed perfectly calm. Every trace of resentment had vanished from her features; and she glanced at the broken railing of the bridge as if the breach was the result

of some accident with which she had no connection. A minute or more she spent upon readjusting one of her gloves, which had become rumpled during the struggle, and then, without another word, turned and proceeded towards the house.

She had disappeared amongst the trees before Eleanor looked around her, and, at last, ventured to rise. She had not fallen heavily, and saving that she had bruised one of her elbows insignificantly, and slightly soiled her dress, she had suffered little beyond a terrible fright.

Still, she might not, after brushing the dust off her dress, have proceeded also towards the house quite so deliberately had she known that Rosamond had stepped aside from the path, and stood amongst the trees watching her approaching and passing within a couple of yards of her hiding place.

When she had gone by, Rosamond still waited full five minutes. Then coming back to the path she followed her. The trees soon grew more sparse, and presently gave place to softly rolling lawns with big clumps of rhododendron. Then the house came into view, and a short flight of stone steps that descended from the French window of a library to the lawn. Entering by the window Rosamond closed it behind her, and passing into the hall ascended the stairs. On the landing her mother's nurse met her.

'If you please, miss, do you know where Miss Kirby is?' asked the nurse.

'No,' replied Rosamond. 'Has she not come in?'

'I don't know, miss. Mis'ess has been looking for her. Perhaps you would speak to her. She is in her room.'

Rosamond proceeded to her mother's

room. Upon entering she found herself almost in darkness, owing to a large folding-screen placed near the door. Beyond the screen a faint light was afforded by a shaded lamp. As far from the lamp as was possible Mrs. Peyton sat amongst many pillows and cushions, in a large, dimity-covered arm-chair.

A thin, broken-looking woman, languid and weariful, with dull, feeble features and wasted face, whose pallor was perceptible even in the dim light. She lay back amidst the pile of cushions as if exhausted by some unusual fatigue.

Having gently closed the door so as to make no unnecessary noise—the smallest unexpected sound sufficed to make her mother start—Rosamond crossed the room treading lightly.

Without moving or looking round, the invalid asked, in a low voice,

'Is that you, Eleanor dear?'

'No, mamma. It is I, Rosamond.'

'Rosamond! What do you want?'

In the querulous voice a note of alarm was distinctly perceptible, and Mrs. Peyton moved amongst her supporting pillows as if shrinking from her daughter.

'I don't want anything, mamma, thank you. I met nurse at the head of the stairs, and she asked me to come to you.'

'I wanted Eleanor,' said Mrs. Peyton, in a plaintive tone, 'not you. Eleanor promised to take a walk with me, after she had been somewhere with you: I don't know where. I have been all over the house looking for her. I suppose you have only just come in. You none of you have any consideration for me. I have been alone, with no one to talk to, all the evening. I shall not be here to trouble you much longer. Where is Eleanor?'

'I don't know, mamma. She did not go out with me. I think she went out with papa.'

'I daresay. You none of you think of me. I am alone all day. And you know what the medical men have said about the importance of my having exercise: and I cannot go out alone. But—it does not matter. What are you waiting for, Rosamond?'

'Only to know whether I can do anything for you, mamma. Shall I go and see if I can find Eleanor?'

'No, no. Not if she has been out with your father,' replied Mrs. Peyton, hurriedly. 'I thought she was with you. I never know what any of you are doing. It is too late now. Do you *want* anything, Rosamond?'

The last question referred merely to the fact that Rosamond had, instead of quit-

ting the room as fast as possible, sat down.

'No, mamma.'

And she rose.

Mrs. Peyton looked relieved.

Only, when Rosamond had gone about half-way to the door, she called her.

'How much longer is your brother going to remain in London?'

'I do not know, mamma.'

'He has again written to your father to say that he wishes to stay a little longer—to complete these studies of his.'

'So Eleanor told me.'

'It will end in his over-reading himself—as I am always telling him. But of course no one regards anything I say. And Eleanor must wonder that he does not come down here to join her. Is this some new contrivance of yours to annoy Eleanor? When she and your father are put out it all recoils on me. Only you

none of you ever consider me. It is useless to speak to you, I know. You and your brother are always having secrets. Only——'

She stopped short, and, raising herself in her chair, said,

'Listen!'

A man's step was audible in the corridor.

'That is your father,' exclaimed Mrs. Peyton, with hurried trepidation. 'Why are you here? Go at once—through the dressing-room. Don't let your father see you.'

She spoke as if being detected by her husband talking to her daughter was some unpardonable offence. Rosamond understood her meaning, and hastily quitted the room by a side-door half a minute before her father entered.

Outside she slipped noiselessly along the corridor, and to her own room. Though

the room was dark, some little light still lingered by the window which remained open. Putting down her hat upon one of the tables, Rosamond Peyton passed to the window, and, resting her elbows on the sill, regarded the night whilst she slowly drew off her gloves. She had not been offered, like Eleanor, any choice of rooms, but had simply had one assigned her, and her window commanded no view, save that of a broad gravel walk below it, and the boughs of the trees, here close to the house. Already she had forgotten the conversation with her mother, and the extraordinary insinuation that she was in some way the occasion of her brother's absence. The other subjects of which she had to think were so much more grave. Gazing into the blackness of the trees, she mused, with a little shudder:

'I came near doing it that time! If I

had done it? If she had not spoken? How should I have felt now? I could not be much more wretched than I am. But I had no idea that the temptation came upon one like that, in an instant, and absolutely without a thought of hesitation. That is really awful. If she had not spoken, I should have flung her into the water. And yet, a minute before, I was not half so angry with her as when I made her take back those gloves. I wonder whether the man who committed the murder at Wold felt all of a sudden just like I did: that there was no other way out of all the complications but to stab his rival on the spot and have done with him; and so stabbed him without a shade of compunction; as I should have drowned Eleanor if she had not named Lennox?— That red light under the trees! He saw that, too, just as I did. "As red as blood,"

he said.—No wonder that every one is afraid of me, and shuns me! I had no suspicion that I was so bad. Yet at the moment—it makes my blood run cold now only to think of it—I did not feel guilty at all!'

CHAPTER IX.

The country road which afforded the shortest route from the nearest railway-station to Belmont was slightly dusty, and the bright sun made the summer afternoon warm for walking; but the turns of the route were picturesque, and, as the road slowly climbed the valley, the soft landscapes unfolded in changeful succession, so that the solitary pedestrian, too lightly glad in his summer suit to feel the temperature an inconvenience, evidently found the beauties of the scene he was traversing a more than sufficient recompense for the

labours of the way. He was taking those labours very easily, stopping often to admire the charms of the wider landscape spread before him, often to make in a pocket sketch-book a hurried sketch that pictured in a few graphic, spirited lines the gentler beauties of the winding way.

In person he was rather short and stout; a round little man; but his braced-up military carriage gave him a measure of dignity. His head, well set upon a powerful neck, presented a large forehead, from which his brown hair swept back naturally in a wavy curl. His small face, a trifle plump, possessed very tolerable features; eyes, bright and quick, and closely shorn cheeks, with firm, angular lines of the jaw-bone. A thick moustache, very slightly curled at the ends, and a beard that extended to the corners of his lips and fell away to a point beneath his

chin, almost concealed his mouth. More attractive, however, than the mere physical outlines of his features was his bright, frank expression of a man leading a contented life of a kind that amused him; and his easy manner and light elastic tread, suggesting one of those happy individuals, favourites alike of fortune and nature, who take all the world in good part, and the whole of life for a holiday.

As the traveller approached a village to which more than one sign-post had directed him, he began looking about him to the right and left. Evidently he was a stranger to the locality, and in search of some object which he was desirous not to miss.

At length his eyes lighted upon the goal of his journey, a small, solitary house, by the side of a turning not more than twenty yards in length, that led to the gate of a turnip-field. The name of the house

was painted upon its small, wooden gate, 'Wee Nestie'; one of those ridiculous names that forcibly suggest the desirability of withdrawing from the public at large their terribly abused liberty to choose special appellations for their residences. By the side of the gate a large board announced, 'This detached villa to let.'

'Detached villa' was certainly a very fine name for a tumble-down place, not at all picturesque, perfectly shapeless, and built principally of lath and plaster—it had been recently fresh plastered—to which all sorts of additions had been made at odd times, in a random fashion, so that all the windows, no two of the same dimensions, were dotted about in confusion. The various additions had apparently quarrelled amongst themselves, as well as with the original structure. At least, that was the general impression given by a great

part of the building being out of the perpendicular, and the whole evidently disposed to resolve itself spontaneously into its original elements. Some creepers had been trained about it, and covered a porch of trellis-work before the door. Another side was clad with ivy. Large elm-trees grew close against the building, spreading their boughs over the roof. A broken hedge of thorn perhaps once neat, but ruined by long neglect, surrounded a small garden. Its breaches had been partially repaired by hurdles of wattle placed behind them.

'What can have persuaded Florence to live in this hole?' said the pedestrian to himself.

Entering by the wooden gate, he rang a decrepit bell that audibly answered to his pull in a cracked voice.

'Is Mrs. Dromere at home?'

'Yes, sir,' answered the domestic.

In the small hall about eight feet square the visitor recognised some familiar pieces of furniture, a good deal too large for the positions which they at present occupied.

'What name, sir, please?' asked the Abigail, with her hand on a door in a crooked frame.

'Major Torres.'

As he spoke, his ear caught the sound of a foot-fall on the stairs that made him look round.

A woman of about thirty, wearing a sailor hat, and a simple, but well-cut walking-dress that fitted faultlessly upon a pretty figure, was descending the stairs. Without being precisely handsome, she was good-looking, with a face that suggested a character of a good deal of strength, and no small measure of self-reliance. She

had beautiful hair that seemed to make its escape on every side beneath the level brim of her hat, and as her lips parted in a bright smile, they disclosed two even lines of pretty teeth.

'Major Bob!' she exclaimed, in a soft, rich voice, wherein pleasure mingled with surprise.

'I myself, Florence,' replied the Major.

'Well, this is a surprise,' said Florence Dromere, shaking hands. 'Who would have thought of seeing you down here! It is awfully good of you to have come to see me, Bob. You will stop and have something, of course. I don't attempt dining late: but I daresay I can give you something better than tea and bread and butter. What has brought you into this part of the world?'

'I have been in Dartmouth for a day or two; and I thought that, before going back

to town, I would just run over and see you.'

'That was really kind of you.'

They had entered the little drawing-room, the Major closing the door behind him, and Florence simultaneously slipping off her hat. When she had done that, and given her luxurious tresses a touch whilst she looked at herself in the mirror over the mantel, the Major as she turned gave her a kiss on the lips, which she returned without demur.

'You were just going out?' he said.

'Only because I had nothing better to do, Bob. We will have a talk. That will be much more amusing. Sit down and light your pipe.'

She offered him a chair just outside the narrow window, under the shade of the trees. The Major sat down, charged his pipe, and bestowed a glance upon the

small garden. It was not a particularly attractive spot. Something had been recently done to make the narrow paths neat, and to turf the lawn; but the whole had an uncomfortably raw appearance.

'I need not stand upon ceremony with you, Bob,' said Florence, with her hand on the bell. 'And yet I am half ashamed to have to ask you when you must leave. Only, you see, getting anywhere from this place is not quite easy. If we have something to eat at seven, will that do?'

'I want to go back by the evening coach.'

'In that case, I am afraid it must be half-past-six.'

She rang, and having given some orders joined him under the shade of the trees, bringing some fancy work in her hand.

'And now, what do you think of my new quarters?' she asked, as she sat down. 'Were you not surprised when you heard of my coming here?'

'I am a good deal more surprised since I have seen the place,' replied the Major, lighting his pipe. 'What in the world put it into your head to take up your residence in this outlandish spot?'

'I am not so well off as I should like to be, Bob.'

'None of us are. Money is growing scarcer every day. I shall have somehow to reduce my expenses. I cannot afford to live as I used to do.'

His remarks did not make much impression on his hearer. All Major Torres's acquaintances were familiar with his habit of dilating upon the expensiveness of everything; and Florence Dromere con-

tinued, almost as if she had not heard him,

'It was like this. I had a mortgage on this place; one of poor George's mortgages. He had it, I think, from his uncle. Anyone else would have looked a little into the matter. But you know what George was. For the last two or three years I have not been able to get any interest, and at last I was obliged to foreclose. There is a little land attached to the house; and now, since all the rents have fallen, and with the place ruined by neglect, the whole property is not worth half the money lent upon it. When I got possession I found I could not let it, so I had no alternative but to come here and live in it—until I can find a tenant.'

'Do you think you will find a tenant?'

'I hope so. The place is more presentable than it was when I came here. By-

and-by, when I have done a little more for it, possibly some one who likes the country might take a fancy to it.'

'I don't see how you can be saving any money by living here, Florence,' remarked the Major. 'It must have cost you something to bring all your things down from town. And you say you are spending money on the house. All labour is so enormously expensive now-a-days. Besides, I should say the place was hardly worth it.'

'Things don't cost so much here as in London,' explained Florence. 'And, at any rate, I save my rent. You know, I am not very rich, Bob.'

She spoke unreservedly, though not quite with the frankness of a girl. Neither she nor the Major were young enough for that. Only very young people have the courage to talk quite freely about them-

selves, and to feel no misgivings about what they say. As folks grow older the same inclination to talk about themselves remains with them, but experience of the world's indifference to their inmost thoughts allows them no longer to be absolutely frank; and the spell of youth's ingenuousness is broken.

'I doubt whether you will find keeping an old place in repair an economy,' observed the Major, and then—for he suspected his hostess was unwilling to be pressed for the real reasons for her coming to live at 'Wee Nestie,'—changed the subject to ask, 'Dull down here, is it not? A trifle too quiet; nothing ever happens, I should say?'

'It is very quiet. Only, things happen in quiet places too—sometimes.'

'Not much in the way of sensation here, I should say,' laughed the Major.

'You don't quite understand the world yet, Bob,' replied Florence, with a slight air of superiority. 'You live too much in London. But you have heard, no doubt, of "Still Waters." Which way did you come? By the coach?'

'As far as it would bring me.'

'And did no one point out Wold to you?'

'Wold? No.'

'You ought to see Wold—it stands in a picturesque position.'

'Wold—Wold—the name reminds me of something.'

'Naturally. It is the place where your cousin Alfred Torres was murdered by Chevalier.'

'Of course. Is that near here?'

'A couple of miles or so.'

'Who has the house now?'

'Mrs. Chevalier. She bought it—some two years after the murder.'

'Chevalier's wife?'

'No, his mother. His wife died in childbirth.'

'I never heard that. And the mother lives in the house in which her son committed a murder for which he was executed. That seems odd.'

'Mrs. Chevalier is an odd woman. She is an old woman now. Chevalier was an only son, you know, and the child his wife had after his death died: so that the old lady is quite alone.'

'A good thing that the child died.'

'Well, I suppose it was. If it had lived —I have no idea whether it was a boy or a girl—sooner or later some accident must have made it acquainted with its father's history. But poor old Mrs. Chevalier is very lonely. They say her house is a marvel. The Chevaliers were all wealthy, you know.'

'You have not seen the house, then?'

'Only from a distance. No one is admitted. The only visitors Mrs. Chevalier sees are the rector and her medical man.'

The Major smoked his pipe meditatively for a minute or more. He was a man a little curious about other people's affairs, and he had a theory of his own respecting Florence Dromere—that she was one of those young widows who are bent upon marrying again. Whether he was right or not may be left for time to show. But when he first heard of her going to live in this remote corner of the West of England, he immediately connected the step with his favourite theory. Men are fond of connecting stray incidents with favourite theories. And it may be admitted that though he had come to look her up, for the sake of seeing her, yet he had some

hope also of learning a little about what was going on.

'You do not find many people to know, down here?' he recommenced.

'I have found some friends. I am not the only person who has recently come to live in the neighbourhood.'

As she spoke she gave him a sly regard. Evidently he was about at last to hear something. The proximity of Wold, and the existence of Mrs. Chevalier, and the story of the murder of nearly a quarter of a century ago, had not particularly interested him. He said to himself, 'Ah, now it is coming! I was sure there was some secret.'

'Indeed: who else has been attracted by this interesting locality?' he inquired.

'Some people you know—or, perhaps, I should rather say, some one whom you know: rather a friend of yours.'

'Indeed.'—He thought for an instant.—'I have heard of no one.'

'Then the surprise will be all the more agreeable. The lady—oh, yes, this is a lady—to whom I allude is no less a person than the original of your picture in the Academy. I was never more surprised in my life, Bob, than when I first met her. I could have imagined that your jealous lady had stepped out of her picture-frame.'

'Oh.'

He did not appear to be much interested.

'What does that "oh" mean, Bob?'

'Nothing in particular.'

'I always supposed that the young person in amber was an artistic invention of yours. It turns out that she is a sketch from life.'

'No. I improved a good deal on the original.'

'The conceit of you men!'

'But I admit that I had a suggestion,' continued the Major. 'Only that is a sort of secret—which I have promised to keep.'

'Oh, a secret too! I am afraid you have been hit very hard, Bob.'

'Hit? Not at all.'

'So striking a portrait, displaying not only the lady's exact personal appearance but the whole of her character, seems a bad way of keeping a secret. You must have been on terms of considerable intimacy with Miss Peyton: and enormously interested too—to read her so exactly. That girl will be your fate, Bob.'

'I trust not.'

'You trust not! Ah, you don't know. Ladies that are interesting studies are dangerous.'

'But I was not at all interested. I was

pleased to have met with an unexpected suggestion : that was all.'

'But you had met her and talked to her. You must have done so. Because you have painted her to the life; and she is not always like that. I should not at once have guessed her disposition if I had not seen your picture—nor have supposed her so handsome as she really is. You revealed her to me. Somehow, Bob, you must have read the innermost secrets of the girl's character.'

It was the Major's turn to smile.

'I am glad you found the picture a revelation,' he said, with a little pride. 'All the real meaning of the work was my own invention. The suggestion I had was of the barest kind.'

Florence Dromere was thinking. She had been very much entertained at having discovered the original of Major Torres's

celebrated picture, though she had discreetly refrained from making any remarks on the subject to the young lady herself. But now she did not know exactly what to think.

'At any rate,' she remarked, 'they are all living down here. They arrived about a fortnight before me.'

'All, who?'

'Miss Peyton and her people.'

'Her people too.'—The Major was interested on the spot.—'Do you know them?'

'I met them at the Rectory.'

'Tell me all about them.'

'But what shall I tell you? How much do you know already?'

'Suppose that I know nothing, please, or—I'll explain. I was thinking about a picture; wanting one; looking about me; waiting for one of those inspirations that

never come when one is in need of them. Do you understand?'

'I have heard you say the same thing before.'

'Well; I saw a photograph of Miss Peyton, quite accidentally: and it at once suggested that picture to me. Afterwards I also saw the lady herself. I was a little curious to see her. I was not introduced to her: only she was at a dinner-party at a house in town to which I was invited. And I heard some things about her, not much. But chiefly I digested that photograph—and then I worked my notion up. I fished up a model something like her in some respects. Only the character was wanting. All that I worked out. And I gave promises—I mean about the photograph—and some other things—that I would rather keep.'

'Then you actually don't know her?'

'Not at all.'

'That is an enviable power, Bob, just with a hint in a portrait, and an hour or two in a woman's society, to be able to paint an embodiment of character as vivid and passionate as your picture.'

'You must remember that probably the idea when one had once conceived it could be worked at only in one particular way,' observed the Major, with all the modesty of a real artist.

Artists are by no means all modest. But, when they are so, their modesty is of the finest type of that splendid characteristic of great souls.

'You have drawn the girl body, soul, and spirit.'

'Have I? It was unintentional, I assure you. I was thinking only of making a picture.'

'She must have made a stronger im-

pression upon you, Bob, than you suppose.'

'Perhaps. Tell me something about her people. Who are they? There is some mystery—a big family skeleton, is there not?'

'A big, family skeleton: I have not heard that. At the same time—well, you shall hear. They are Leicestershire people; an old county family, it seems. I fancy that Mr. Peyton is rather proud of his family. He is a striking man—*distingué*—does not look happy—and is distinctly not communicative. His wife is an invalid: a very feeble person. It is on her account that they are down here. Besides the daughter whose portrait you painted there is a son, and a niece, a Miss Kirby. It is from the niece that one hears things: she is a pleasant, chatty girl: well—she is more than that, a very pretty girl,

with charming manners, and, I fancy, no end of talent; one of those rarities, an accomplished girl whom one cannot help liking. She has evidently had a splendid education; and one can see that Mr. Peyton is enormously proud of her. He is himself a man of a cultivated turn of mind. Only all this time I am telling you nothing about Miss Rosamond Peyton.'

'Is the lady called Rosamond? I did not know it. Never mind her. Go on telling me about the rest of them.'

CHAPTER X.

Florence regarded him. Why should he not wish to hear anything about Rosamond Peyton? Surely he could not be so indifferent to her as he pretended.

'I have told you all I *know*,' she resumed. 'There remains only some things that I do not understand. You hinted at a family skeleton. I suppose if I ask any questions—you will reply with another allusion to your promises——'

She paused, giving him an opportunity to reply, and, only when she found that

he made no offer to avail himself of it, continued,

'Well, what I cannot understand, Bob, is this. Mr. Peyton is proud of his family, and is himself the last representative of a long line. For a good many years after his marriage, Mrs. Peyton had no children, and he was much distressed about the apparent extinction of the family. I hear all this from the niece, you know. Howbeit, in the course of time Mrs. Peyton presented her lord and master with twins, and, of course, Mr. Peyton was delighted. That was natural enough. But now that the young people are grown up he takes no notice of them, and is wholly devoted to his niece.'

'Perhaps he is a man of eccentric humours,' suggested the Major, watching the blue smoke rising from his pipe.

'I cannot tell you. Everyone remarks

upon his strange treatment of his children. The rector assures me that he neglects his son as completely as he does his daughter. Indeed, neglect is hardly the right word: at times Mr. Peyton's air is one of positive dislike.'

'To his own children. Odd.'

'Is it not? There is perhaps a kind of explanation—if it be an explanation. You must understand that the niece is really a fascinating girl: and the daughter contrasts unfavourably with her. Possibly Mr. Peyton has found himself compelled to compare his niece and daughter, and to come to conclusions not favourable to the latter, and so is disappointed in his own children. That must be painful. Yet, do you know, I feel sorry for Rosamond Peyton. It is evident that the girl is acutely conscious of being placed completely in the background by her cousin's superior

talents and attractiveness, and by her father's and mother's predilection for her: because Mrs. Peyton's preference for the pretty niece is as marked as her husband's. It is her niece that invariably accompanies her, and shows her all the little attentions that an invalid requires. Of her daughter Mrs. Peyton seems to me to be a little afraid.'

'The daughter does not appear to be a very attractive young person.'

'They are an unhappy family, Bob; that is the truth—father, mother, daughter, and all. Only the niece is charming. And I sometimes think that one might like the father, or, at any rate, respect him—if one could get behind his barrier of reserve.'

'Is the girl's mother at all like her?'

'Could not be more unlike. They have not a single trait of feature or character in common.'

'Takes after her father, then?'

'N—o,' replied Florence Dromere, slowly pricking her work with the point of her needle. 'She is completely unlike her father too.'

The Major looked at her, rather significantly. Then, after a moment's pause, he observed,

'I heard there was something—rather inexplicable. And the son, is he also absolutely without resemblance to either father or mother? But I think you said just now that the children are twins, did you not?'

'Yes, they are twins. But I cannot tell you much about the son. I have not seen him. I believe that he has not yet come down here.'

'Oh, then you don't know the son?' said the Major, in the voice of a man taken by surprise.

Florence Dromere looked up, and arrested her needle.

'Dear me, Bob!' she said, laughing, 'in what a grave tone you said that. Pray, of what have you been thinking all this while that I have been talking to you about the Peytons?'

'I fancied I began to understand why you were down here,' admitted the Major, frankly.

'But I told you why.'

'I know—only——'

'As usual you were persuaded that I was in pursuit of some man. Well,' resuming her sewing, 'you are wrong again, Bob, as you have been a good many times before. I should like to know why you are perpetually persuaded that I must be always setting my cap at some one or another?'

'You'll marry again, Florence. I have

always told you so,' said the Major, oracularly.

'Possibly enough—if a man presents himself who is able to offer me a comfortable home. I don't think I have ever made a secret of that, Bob. Only, I have made up my mind to have the establishment, you know.'

'I should think I did know. Who is there that does not know the expensiveness of you women? That is why men like myself cannot afford to marry.'

'You could well enough afford to marry, if you liked, Bob.'

'Thank you, no. I am not attracted by the prospect of making myself uncomfortable merely to indulge the tastes of some lady who is desirous of being provided with a comfortable establishment.'

'Then choose one of another kind. All are not in the same case as I.'

'All women are expensive.'

'No. A good wife of the right sort would save you money, Bob. You need not choose a widow, you know. You are not quite just to me, Bob. And yet you ought to understand. You know that I loved George dearly. And I never mean to love any other man like that again.'—Was there a shade of *arrière pensée* in her voice?—'For one thing I could not, if I wished it. A woman has not two young, fresh, girlish loves to give away. Besides, one grows older, and thinks of other things. If I marry again, it will be simply that I may be a little better off. I should like to be better off.'

'Mercenary.'

'No, Bob. Honest. I would not marry a man who did not understand me. He would have a good wife; and in return would make me more comfortable than I

am now. It would be a very fair bargain.'

'Say a good bargain. You women do not see what you cost men. You are the most expensive things in the world. That is why I do not marry. But of course you will. I have never understood how it is that you have not married before now. Why did you not accept your cousin when he wanted you? He has plenty of money.'

'What, Marmaduke Torres? A man eight years younger than myself, who proposed to me when he was just one-and-twenty! My dear Bob, I am not an absolute idiot: nor so completely devoid of self-respect as to *wish* to be an object of universal ridicule.'

'Well, I admit that you would have made a fool of yourself; and he too. Still, I fancied——'

'That it would have come off? Bob, you will always be a great baby! The

opinion you have of me is positively disrespectful. To suppose that when I was nearly thirty I did not know better than to be the dupe of the calf-love of a boy. I only hope, Bob, that no designing female may discover the ingenuous youth that lurks under your military and artistic exterior, and make you, notwithstanding all your talents and other good qualities, the victim of an idiotic marriage.'

'You need not entertain any apprehension on that score.'

'Saying that exhibits your ignorance, Bob. I entertain the gravest apprehensions sometimes, I assure you. Oh, yes,' —this assuming a tone of distinct superiority to the artistic Major, who listened with a very complacent smile,—'I know a deal more about such things than you do, Bob. I have been married, and you have not, remember. I should not be

surprised at anything I heard about you. There is this Miss Peyton. Your ignorance about her is positively infantine. You do not see that you have been studying her; and she has evidently made a much greater impression upon you than you suppose. If you saw a little of her, you would succumb in an instant.'

'To Miss Peyton!'

'Oh, you need not assume that tone, Bob. You will come to me some day, looking very sheepish, to inform me that you have fallen a victim to those dark eyes of hers which you have painted so divinely, my dear nephew.'

The Major winced.

'Now don't begin that, Florence. You know it is ridiculous.'

'On the contrary, I know that, so far from being ridiculous, it is the simple truth. You are my nephew, and you

ought to have more respect for your aunt.'

What she said was true. She was two years his junior, but his aunt for all that, being the youngest girl of a large family, of which his father had been the eldest son.

The Major detested any allusions to the fact. They awoke in him painful reminiscences of his later school days, and of the subsequent epoch when he was a cadet and a sub-lieutenant. As children, Florence and he had been playfellows, and all their lives the best of friends, although as they grew older Florence—always a forward young lady—would put on her small airs, and remind him that she was his aunt, and therefore entitled to command his obedience, as her own aunts commanded hers. Afterwards, just at the time when he began to suffer from those distempers of vanity and self-importance,

which so distressingly attack the young human male towards the conclusion of his period of growth, and during the first years of his manhood, Florence reached the age when a girl suddenly shoots ahead of her male compeers. The two years advantage of her that he had vanished completely, and she found a young girl's mischievous pleasure in making 'her nephew Bob' feel himself the veriest baby by referring to their mutual relationship upon every possible occasion; even going to the length of classing him with 'the other children' after he had received his commission. Bob expostulated in vain. Nature had played him this trick; Florence would have her laugh; and he had to pay for it with his wounded vanity. If he reminded her that he was the older of the two, she merely replied, 'So much the better for me!' If he hinted at the possibility of a future

when she would not wish to have the world informed that she was his aunt, she answered, 'I shall always be two years younger than you, Bob. But I shall be your aunt if you live to be a hundred.'

But it must be at once recorded to the Major's credit that, as the years rolled on, and Florence married, and then became a widow, and then found that she would never again be able to write her age with a number beginning with the blessed figure *two*—unless she could manage to live to be two-hundred—he showed himself altogether superior to the little meanness of taking his revenge. On the contrary, when men asked him, 'By the way, Torres, how old is Mrs. Dromere? I heard some man saying that she was your aunt. She hardly looks that;' he answered, promptly, 'Well, she is my aunt, in a sort of ridiculous way, if you want to

know. You see, my grandfather married twice, and had a very large family: my father was his eldest son, and Mrs. Dromere his youngest daughter. As a matter of fact, she is several years my junior.'

Which, seeing how mercilessly he had been teased, was good of the Major.

For all that he had not yet learned to laugh at Florence Dromere's playfully claiming her privileges of an aunt, nor altogether divested himself of his resentment of any allusion to the relationship. It is not uncommon for a man never to become reconciled to a thing that, at one epoch of his life, has been an annoyance.

Florence was folding up her work, and now proposed,

'Will you take a stroll round my small domain? We shall have plenty of time before tea.'

He assented readily. She put on her

hat before the mirror, again gave her hair a touch with her fingers, and then they strolled out of the little garden together, as she said,

'I should like you to see the place, Bob. The neighbourhood is really pretty. And I suppose the house could be made picturesque in a quaint way by anyone who liked to spend a little money on it. It would be nice of you, Bob, if you could say a kind word for it, and help me to get it off my hands. I don't want to be buried down here for ever.'

'I can't make out why you ever came at all,' said the Major.

To which she made no answer.

When they returned high-tea was awaiting them. Florence had done her best to meet her nephew's epicurean tastes with such viands as she could command at so short a notice. After the meal, she offered,

'Bob, I'll walk to the coach with you. I don't often get a glimpse of an old friend down here.'

So they set off together, retracing the road by which the Major had come. A part of the way she was silent. She was revolving with herself whether she would not, after all, confide to him the real reason of her having elected to reside at 'Wee Nestie.' She came very near doing it too; for she was really grateful to him for having paid her a visit, and she had few secrets from him. But some womanly reluctance to avow a weakness prevailed, and she kept her own counsel.

Unexpectedly at a turn of the road a dog-cart, in which a high-stepping mare was harnessed, appeared coming rapidly towards them.

'Oh, Bob!' exclaimed Florence Dromere, 'this is destiny.'

'What?'

'That is Mr. Peyton. The fair girl sitting by him is his niece; and the lady on the back seat is the original of your portrait.'

The trap swept past them, Mr. Peyton raising his hat and the girls returning Florence Dromere's bow.

She and the Major had stood back against the hedge, for the country road was not wide, and, as the dog-cart disappeared, the Major looked after it. When they walked on, he observed,

'That girl is more like the picture I painted than I supposed.'

'You mean the picture is more like the girl?'

'I fancied that whilst working up the picture I had painted away from her a good deal.'

'And all the time you were only paint-

ing up to her, you see. I told you that she had made a much stronger impression upon you than you supposed. You will marry that girl, Bob. Do you not feel as if your fate passed by you just now?'

'I can't say I do. On the other hand, now that I have seen her again, Miss Peyton does not appear to me interesting at all.'

'I should have thought that any woman must have been interesting to a man who had read all the secrets of her character as you must have read that poor girl's, to make your picture so perfect an interpretation of her inmost soul. But there is no understanding you artists.'

'No. We don't understand ourselves,' agreed the Major.

Florence waited with him at the cross-road for the coach, and, having once more thanked him for coming to see her, stood

waving her hand until the coach disappeared, and then turned her steps homeward alone.

These solitary walks in the sweet country air did her good. Life at 'Wee Nestie' was dull: and all the entertainment she could make herself, by being a little curious about the people at Belmont, did not do much to enliven it. It would be long before she could expect another visit from any of her old friends. And she was not quite happy. Only, when the air was so sweet, and the summer loveliness of the country so beautiful, she found it easier to be wise and mind what she was about.

She was glad that she had told Bob no secrets.

When she reached home, she went upstairs to her own room. The room was prettily furnished, for she had pretty things, all those with which George and

she had set up home—not so many years ago, though the time seemed distant. But the room itself was an ugly room, a stupid room that would never look satisfactory. She had been deceiving herself when she supposed that 'a little money' spent upon 'Wee Nestie' could make it picturesque. The whole place was simply stolidly, vulgarly ugly, and nothing could make it anything else.

She put away her hat carefully, and then sitting down unlocked the drawer of a small bureau, and drew out a miniature, which she put to her lips.

Poor Florence! A tear trembled in her eye. This was George.

'If George had lived!' she whispered.

Ah! If the people had stayed here who are gone! There are plenty left who might have taken their places in the cold ground, and not have been missed.

Only George was one of those that went. And he left Florence poor—and fairly broken-hearted.

As she had told Bob, never would she love anyone again as she had loved George. But her poverty pinched her cruelly. She was poorer than Bob supposed; poorer than any of her friends supposed; and hid the fact—for George's sake. But she was still a good-looking woman, and, if the chance offered, she would marry again. Not for love. Only to escape this cruel poverty. There was no infidelity to George in that.

But the years passed, and the marriage that was to rescue her from the weekly, daily battle with the tradesmen's horrible little accounts did not come off. She had offers; but some were ridiculous, like that her cousin Marmaduke had made her whilst he was still an undergraduate: and

others promised no release from the horrible 'little accounts.' So she refused them all. She was in search of a bargain; not of a romance.

Only this spring, in town, she thought she had found what she wanted. *He* was a really nice fellow, of her own age, or a month or two older, and had a comfortable income. True, he was a little more *épris* than she wished. She did not want a husband who would some day upbraid her with having accepted love when she knew she had nothing but duty to exchange for it. But then *Il-y-a toujours un qui aime, et un qui se laisse aimer.*

Only, one evening, after they had met at a dance, she found herself thinking of him, as if she was——

'No, I am not fond of him. I am not a bit fond of him. I won't be fond of him,' she exclaimed aloud to herself.

But she flung herself down on her bed, and cried.

Before the end of the week she had left London, and came down to 'Wee Nestie,' which she had been in vain trying to let. Ten days afterwards she learned that the man had gone abroad, after saying some very hard things about her. The news was welcome.

'I do not want to fall in love again,' she said to herself. 'I do not want to give any other man what I gave George.'

So she remained at 'Wee Nestie,' quietly allowing separation and new scenes to do their gentle work, and to cure her of an unexpected tenderness, of which some tangled complication of antagonistic emotions and irrevocable resolutions made her ashamed.

Poor Florence! It was a dreary task.

'I wonder what will happen?' she said to herself, musingly.

What will happen! Who can give a guess—save that the event will be something altogether unanticipated. For all voyagers across life's misty sea each succeeding day unfolds the same perpetual surprise, the unexpected turn of things that brings about what was impossible, and places all that seemed certain out of human reach. Whether like Florence Dromere women stand waiting in anxious doubt, like Eleanor Kirby step forwards gaily towards life's happy promises, or like Rosamond Peyton hang back with shuddering dread; whether like Lennox Peyton men move with grave steps intent upon fulfilling what, amongst many perplexities, seems best, or tread life carelessly in conscious possession of their strength, like his friend Marmaduke Torres; whether like Mr. Peyton they keep silent counsel amidst doubt, or like Major Bob are confident of an

ability to read in advance what the mere machinery of time will make the future disclose—unanticipated is the fate of all like. Chance, ever busy with gossamer scattered threads of human motive, spins the stray strands together, till they thicken into mighty cords that draw men on to acts no human prescience can foretell.

CHAPTER XI.

Florence Dromere was correctly informed when she said that she believed Lennox Peyton had not yet joined the family at Belmont.

His studies in London had taken a longer time than he had anticipated. No intimation that he was wanted in Devonshire reached him from Belmont, and his friends, who were pleased to have him with them, being urgent that he should remain and finish his reading, he continued to accept their hospitality and to prosecute

his studies. Once or twice he came across Marmaduke Torres, when the latter was in town—Torres was one of those men who never spend two consecutive weeks in the same locality. Twice or thrice also he went to the Academy—and had another look at 'No. 104.' There was always a crowd before the painting which continued to be as popular as ever. Between his visits, Lennox Peyton persuaded himself that he must have made some mistake in imagining it to be a portrait of his sister, but was again convinced of the fact the instant that he found himself standing before it. He spoke of the resemblance to no one. But more than once he was on the point of mentioning the picture in one of his letters to his sister, and of asking her whether she had anywhere met Major Torres; and then resolved to say nothing on the subject until he saw her.

At Belmont no one alluded to his absence, except Eleanor, who would now and then say,

'I wonder when we shall see Lennox. The country is looking *so* beautiful, he ought to be down here. I suppose he will come soon.'

At last, about a week after Major Torres's visit to Florence Dromere, Mr. Peyton received a letter announcing his arrival for the middle of the week.

'I shall drive down to the station and bring Lennox home in the dog-cart,' said Rosamond when the day came.

She anticipated objections to her proposal on the part of some one or another of the family; but none were raised; and, when the branch train came into the small country station, she was alone on the platform to meet him.

His air was always serious, but his dark

face, with its ascetic lines and his impressive black eyes, seemed to Rosamond graver than ever as he stepped from the carriage. When he saw her his features lighted, but with a smile in which there was more of tenderness than of brightness.

He had a heap of luggage. A minute or two was spent in seeing it out of the train.

'All yours, Lennox?' asked Rosamond.

'Books,' he explained.

Then he asked,

'Are you alone?'

That was his first question.

'Yes.'

'I am glad. I want you to tell me all about everything: and we shall have more time to talk.'

But the words were an after-thought, prompted by a note of dissatisfaction which he had instantly detected in her abrupt

'Yes.' He had expected to see his cousin with her.

The reply, nevertheless, reassured Rosamond, and sufficed at once to dissipate the hard light which his question had called up in her eyes—how like the Major's picture it made her! Full of jealous suspicions as she always was, her heart responded at once to any expression on Lennox's part of a wish for her society or her counsel.

She was smiling when they passed out of the station (having left the luggage to be sent on in a cart) and, in a minute or two, they were bowling gaily along the level high-road, laughing together at the astonishment of a porter who had unwittingly attempted to swing one of the heavy trunks, full of books, on to his shoulder.

Then Lennox began asking questions, often interrupted by Rosamond to point

out their route (he had taken the reins) as they diverged from the broad highway, and passed into the crooked country roads that ascended the valley towards Belmont.

'How is father?'

'Very well. You know papa is never ill.'

'He never writes now. A line or two, about business matters only, is all I have received from him since I left home.'

Rosamond made no reply. 'He thinks of no one but that Eleanor!' was the answer she would have made had the information that her father had not written to his son for three months been given her by anyone else. But, as Lennox was in love with Eleanor, she availed herself of a turn in the road to pass over the remark by saying,

'We go to the left: it is a nasty turning.'

'And mother: is she really better down here?'

'No, Lennox. She is worse.'

'I am sorry to hear that. I imagined, when you wrote about father's thinking of buying this place, that mother was stronger.'

'The doctors said she would be. But it seems that they were mistaken. There is no real difference. Mamma mopes just the same: and of course she will never be any better whilst she does that. As for papa's buying Belmont, that is another affair. I will tell you all about it presently.'

'Tell me now. I am curious to hear all you have to say about the place.'

'Don't you want to know how Eleanor is?' asked Rosamond.

'She is quite well, I hope?'

'Yes: she was going for a walk in the woods with papa.'

She did not add that she had purposely abstained from inviting Eleanor to accompany her to the station. Since the accident on the bridge, she had avoided being alone with Eleanor as much as she could.

But she ran on, with the self-torturing instinct that lies at the base of every jealous temperament.

'You would rather I had brought her with me, Lennox, would you not? You were disappointed not to see her at the station. Don't deny it. I saw the disappointment in your face. It was quite natural. The whole world is nothing to a man compared to the girl he loves!'

Leaning back in her seat, she looked

straight down the road before them. She knew that her brother would not answer; and, besides, was herself fully conscious that the speech she had just made was utterly unfair. Only when the words came to her lips she was powerless to repress them.

They approached four cross-roads, and Lennox took the opportunity to ask,

'Which way do we go now?'

'Straight on,' replied Rosamond, rousing herself from her self-accusing reflections.

'Tell me something about Belmont,' he continued. 'I was very much interested by all you wrote. This seems really picturesque country that we are driving through.'

'It is pretty,' assented Rosamond, 'and Belmont is a very pretty place.'

She began a description of the house

and grounds, longer than it had been possible to give in a letter.

'And how do you all get on there, Rosamond?' he inquired, presently.

'You mean—are we happy?' asked Rosamond, in a voice of surprise.

'I mean more comfortable than in Leicestershire,' he explained, as if happiness was more than it was reasonable to anticipate.

'Quite the contrary: at least—I am not comfortable. I am miserable: and mamma is miserable: and papa is miserable. We are all ever so much more miserable than we were at home. I am sure I don't know why we should be: but we are.'

'But, then, if mother is no better—and none of you like the place——'

'I did not say that none of us liked the place,' interrupted his sister. 'There is

one person who is delighted with it—perhaps I had better not name her.'

'Eleanor?'

'Yes, Eleanor. And, if Eleanor likes anything, you know what happens.—You will hate me some day, Lennox, for the way I speak of Eleanor. I am sure of it. You won't be able to help it.'

'I shall be able to help it as long as you are my sister,' answered the man, gently.

'Ah, you think so. But we won't talk about that, Lennox. I am going to tell you about papa's buying Belmont. This is a secret. Papa is buying the place to give to Eleanor: because she wishes to have an estate of her own. No one has yet been told, except Eleanor herself. But I guessed what was going to happen; and, when I spoke to Eleanor, she could not

deny that my surmises were correct. Of course you will think papa is doing right.'

'Father has a right to do what he likes with his own money. And, besides, you know, he can afford it. Father is very wealthy, and lives in an inexpensive way. There is plenty for us all.'

'Of course you take Eleanor's part; and so you should. She is your *fiancée*.—Only if you could have taken a fancy to any other girl, Lennox, you would look at the case more as I do.'

'I should still think father had a right to spend his own money as he pleased.'

'Only there is such a thing as fairness, Lennox. If I wished for something that cost a good deal less than Belmont wil cost—do you think I should get it?'

'Neither you nor I, Rosamond.'

'Yet we are papa's children, and might expect to be as well treated as his niece.'

'Sometimes I fancy that Eleanor's mother was a favourite sister of father's, do you know,' offered the man, by way of explanation, in his grave, pensive way.

'Do you?' replied his sister, caustically. 'You may well call that *fancy*, Lennox. *I* see no occasion to go back to Eleanor's mother for an explanation of her influence over papa.—What are you going to do down here, Lennox?'

'To read. I must read hard, Rosamond. I have done some good work in town, but a good deal still remains. After my first in mods, the college will expect me to take a first in the final schools. And, if I am fortunate, I have hopes that I may do even better than that. I think there is just a chance—don't talk about it—of my getting a fellowship.'

'Really! I am glad of that, Lennox. You have always wished that, have you not?'

Unlike as they were, they understood each other, and each other's wishes, in that intuitive way which young people discover who are thrown, by the neglect of their elders, upon their own resources. Excepting their mutual love, they had not a thought in common.

But they found no need of any. To her he was indulgent with a tenderness that had no limits, a kindness that knew no bounds. That she was passionate and unreasoning never entered his thoughts. That everything served her for an occasion of bitter jealousies only commanded his more delicate regard for her too susceptible sensibilities. And she, in return, was gentle with him, as women are gentle with the men who have won their confi-

dence, trusting him with a simple faith, that was all the more remarkable because there appeared to be no one else in the world whom she did not regard with suspicion.

'Now if only you were not going to marry Eleanor, Lennox, if you get your fellowship, I might come to Oxford and keep house for you. Then we should be happy.'

'Until some suitor carried off my housekeeper,' suggested her brother.

'As if any man was ever likely to notice me,' replied Rosamond, with a laugh.

Finding her in one of her brighter moods, Lennox judged the opportunity propitious for mentioning Major Torres's picture. Besides, he knew that she would wish at once to be told about this painting. She was one of those people who resent receiving at the end of a week information which

could have been communicated at the beginning.

'When you were last in town,' he asked, 'did you meet a Major Torres?'

'No. I have heard of a Major Torres. There is a Mrs. Dromere living near us who has a nephew, Major Torres.'

'The same. You have never seen him?'

'Never. Why?'

'Have you heard that he has a very celebrated picture in the Academy this year?'

'I have heard that he paints. I don't think I have heard anything about his pictures.'

'He has painted a picture of a girl. It is called "Neglected." All London is crazy about it.'

'Why did you ask whether I had met him? Is the neglected lady at all like me?'

'The picture is so like you—when you are angry—that, when I first saw it, I was convinced you must have sat to him.'

'How strange! I should like to see that picture, Lennox.'

She was amused, not affronted.

'I have brought down some of the illustrated catalogues of the pictures of this year's Academy: and you shall see them. Only, none of them do the painting justice. It is an exquisite painting of a very beautiful girl.'

'Well, that is satisfactory, at any rate,' remarked Rosamond. 'And I suppose that is why no one has told me about it. Mrs. Dromere was talking the other day about her nephew, but she did not mention his having accidentally painted a pretty portrait of me.'

'I assure you the resemblance is astonishing.'

'You are really very flattering; but I cannot make you a curtsey at the present moment, Lennox.'

'There is no occasion. I am so glad that you can take the accidental resemblance in good part. I was fearing you might be vexed.'

'What, at being presented to the public in an attractive form. That is a new sensation for me.'

They had passed over the crown of a low hill, and were now descending, by a road that ran along its sides, into a narrowing valley, at the head of which was Belmont. Soon the spire of the village church, not a mile from the house, would be visible, though the house itself would yet long remain hidden among its trees. Presently, pointing across the valley, Rosamond said,

'That is Wold, where Mr. Alfred Torres was murdered by Chevalier.'

'Where?'

'A little farther on you will see it better; when we reach that gate.'

At the gate Lennox reined up.

'That house over there, at the top of that round hill?' he asked.

'Yes.'

Directly opposite them, on the other side of the valley, a round hill with steep sides rose alone, standing a little forward in the hollow, and completely disconnected from the higher undulating hills behind it. At its base the hill had a gentle slope, and here and there the land was cultivated, and mapped out, like all the rest of the valley, in fields. Higher up, the ground rose more abruptly, and at one place was precipitous, with bare, broken

rocks that suggested a landslip in previous ages. All this part of the hill was clothed with trees that made a circular wood, at which it was possible at one place to see a portion of a road winding steeply towards the crown of the hill. Higher up on the summit, another break in the trees afforded another glimpse of a corner of a house of grey stone, with Elizabethan windows and gables, but only of one corner. How the house stood amongst the trees, and with what open space, it was impossible to surmise.

'One cannot see much of the place from here,' remarked Lennox.

'This is the only peep of the house itself that you can get from anywhere,' replied Rosamond. 'From every other point it stands completely hidden amongst the trees, and you would not suppose that there was any house up there at all. It

was not always so. The front of the house used to command a fine view of the valley, as Belmont does, but since Mrs. Chevalier has lived there, she has not had the trees cut, and now the place is almost concealed. You can see that, when the trees grow a little more, this last corner will be covered up too.'

'The house must be a strangely lonely place, buried like that amongst the trees.'

'They say that it is like being in another world. You can see and hear nothing beyond the ring of trees.'

'Except this way.'

'Look again at the windows. Can you see that all the shutters are closed?'

'I see it now that you mention the fact.'

'They are never opened. Those rooms are shut up. But, when the trees have grown tall enough to hide these windows

too, Mrs. Chevalier will have them opened.'

'What an odd notion!'

'Poor woman! Mr. Chevalier was her only son, you know. She wishes to be completely isolated. No one visits her except the rector and her medical man, and she never goes outside the grounds. The rector told me a few things about her. It seems that she is a wonderful old lady, and very charitable, and that the house is marvellously furnished. But no one is admitted. I must confess that I sometimes feel enormously curious to see the place. Only that is quite impossible.—You have heard about the murder?'

They had driven on again.

'Oh, yes,' replied Lennox. 'You see I know Torres—Marmaduke Torres—the son of the murdered man.'—A shade of hesitation was just perceptible in his voice.

He was thinking of the story Marmaduke Torres had told him of his adventure on the river.—'He was at school with me, and still at Christ Church when I matriculated. You must have heard me speak of him.'

'Very likely. I don't remember. He told you all about it?'

'Yes.'

'A hideous murder, was it not, Lennox? The rector did not tell me about *that*. I heard the whole story from his housekeeper. And I never felt so positively awful in my life. When she was telling me how, during the dessert, Chevalier kept on looking at the red glow of the sunset shining like blood under the trees, I thought I was going to faint. All the people in the village are pleased enough to talk about Wold, and the great murder,

and Mrs. Chevalier, if they can get anyone to listen. Many of them believe that the house is haunted. What sort of man is Mr. Marmaduke Torres?'

'The best of good fellows.'

'A reading man.'

Lennox smiled the amused smile which was the nearest approach to a laugh his serious features allowed him. It was a striking smile, with the light playing in his deep eyes.

'Not exactly!' he replied. 'He did certainly get a pass—somehow: that was to please his mother, I believe. But, when I congratulated him on the achievement, he told me, with all the gravity imaginable, "It is a real occasion for congratulation, Peyton: and I assure you that I never mean to open a book, any book, again as long as I live!" And I should say, from what I have seen of him

since, that he will probably carry out his resolution.'

Rosamond laughed.

'What does he do with himself?' she asked.

'Walks, rides, drives, shoots, boats, yachts, smokes, drops in at his club when he is in town, stops at other people's houses, and makes himself generally busy with doing nothing.'

'Do you know, Lennox,' said Rosamond, a little seriously, 'I think I should rather like a man of that kind. He would suit a dunce like me.'

'There are plenty of such men about,' observed her brother. 'Only not many of them are such good fellows as Torres.'

More than a minute's silence ensued, during which his face again resumed its thoughtful expression.

Then he said,

'Perhaps we might get him down here. I should like to invite him to spend a few days with us—if father would let me. He is a little curious to see the place where his father was killed. Only I believe his mother has some dislike to his visiting a spot of ill-omen. And, as admission to Wold is impossible, he might not care only to see the place from a distance.'

He was wondering whether, if Torres did come down, he would recognise in Rosamond the heroine of his adventure on the Thames, and if he did so what might ensue.

But they were drawing near the village, and Rosamond began pointing out various places they passed.

'That is where Mrs. Dromere lives, Major Torres's cousin.' 'That is the Vicarage.' 'Now we take this turn.' 'Can you see those trees on the hill? those

are our woods at Belmont.' 'Here we catch a glimpse of the corner of the house. Do you see it?' 'That is the lodge.'

'It really is a very pretty place,' said Lennox, as they swept up the drive.

At the hall door he helped her to alight: and they entered the house together, whilst a man took the trap round to the stables.

Rosamond was saying to herself,

'And now that Eleanor will pounce upon him.'

As she was thinking it the drawing-room door opened, and Eleanor appeared with a bright smile on her fair face, and both her little hands held out in welcome. She had seen the dog-cart coming up the drive.

Lennox stepped forward to her at once.

'My darling!'

'Dearest,' answered the young girl, yielding herself as his arms closed round her, and his lips bent to her.

'I thought you were *never* coming to see poor little me, Lennox,' she said, playfully. 'You have almost *forgotten* what I am like, have you not?'

'I could never forget that,' answered the man, fondling her.

Rosamond was standing with her face turned away that she should not see them.

CHAPTER XII.

Upon a marble table in a summer-house that stood by the side of one of the less frequented lawns, Lennox Peyton was performing a process which Rosamond watched with a smile of amusement,—the trimming, with a Spanish poniard, of the leaves of a new note-book.

Though still but an undergraduate, Lennox Peyton was acquiring, with a rapidity that had about it something portentous, all the fanciful precise habits that seem to come of themselves to some

men of letters. An excessive neatness characterised all his notes and memoranda; an absolute uniformity of dimension was necessary for his commonplace books. He had indexes and cross references that enabled him in a moment to find anything that he had recorded in his numerous manuscripts; and he became his own binder of certain papers that he desired to have put together into volumes, because he could trust no one else to make them up exactly as he wished.

He was putting together one of these volumes now. The papers had been all sewn, or rather laced together at the back with tape—in a fashion which he had invented for himself; and it remained only to trim the rough edges so that they might all be even like the leaves of a book.

For that purpose he kept a strong, very sharp pocket-knife. But he had left his

knife at Oxford, and to take its place Rosamond had herself a day or two before presented him with a sort of poniard which she had purchased in Plymouth, a strong fine blade, with a sharp point, to which he had since given the edge of a razor.

He had placed the volume he had just made between a drawing-board and a brass edged ruler, and, holding the edge down with one hand, was cutting the leaves to a clean edge with a rapid, slicing cut of the long, sharp blade.

'There now, that is neat, and the pages turn as conveniently as those of a bound book,' he said, when he had finished.

'And was it worth while to take all that trouble, Lennox?' asked Rosamond.

'When the pages are cut evenly like this, one can turn them more quickly. In the end, taking trouble saves time.'

He began to clean up the little scraps of

paper—he was always neat about everything—and to make preparations for continuing his reading, with the assistance of the new volume of notes which he had just constructed.

He often read in the summer-house. When he fancied that his attention had become fatigued with many hours of study in one room, the expedient of a change of scene to the open air refreshed him, and enabled him again to pursue his work with zest and profit.

The summer-house was of a good size, with stucco doric pillars, a sort of classic pediment, and a floor flagged, like that of the verandah, with black and white marble; it was overshadowed by leafy trees, and before it was a large crescent-shaped bed, laid out with a confusion of many flowers, backed with tall holly-hocks. All were now in the height of their summer

brilliance—the manifold, deep, cool shadows, the variegated verdure, the jewelled blossoms of every hue, and the lawns sloping upwards to the house amidst its dark trees. Around the air was soft with the fragrance of the flowers, and musical with the droning of the bees. A pleasant place for study.

It presented only one disadvantage. The scholar was here liable to find his work interrupted. No one disturbed him in the library. Nor did Eleanor speak to him when he was in the summer-house, if she perceived that he was reading. Did he chance to look up as she went by, she greeted him with a little nod and a sunny smile, and so passed on. Eleanor understood the etiquette of study. But Rosamond understood nothing of the kind. If, when she was strolling in the grounds, she caught a glimpse of him in the summer-

house, she never failed to join him, and to stop for a longer or shorter time talking.

He resigned himself to that, laying down his book when she approached, and never suffering her to see that she had interrupted his thoughts or put him to any inconvenience.

On this occasion she had dropped in with the intelligence that Mrs. Dromere had just called.

'You should have come in to see her, Lennox,' said Rosamond, 'she likes you.'

'Very kind of her,' remarked Lennox.

He had been some days previously introduced to Florence Dromere, and had not been able to perceive in her anything particularly attractive. He was interested a little, it is true; but that was because he had heard a story about his friend Torres's having, a few years ago, made love to the

young widow. Why Torres should have done this he was now unable to understand. Torres was fastidious: and Mrs. Dromere appeared to Lennox a rather commonplace sort of woman. Besides, he had said to himself,

'I thought she was younger than that.'

And when a man, of any age, has made that reflection respecting a woman, he seldom bestows much more thought upon her.

Howbeit, Rosamond had, that afternoon, much to say about Mrs. Dromere.

'Eleanor seems to have taken a kind of fancy to her. She thinks her *nice*. Of course that means that we shall be frequently seeing her here.'

That was one of the things Rosamond said. Another was,

'Mrs. Dromere has been raving about Belmont. She dotes upon the country; thinks Devonshire exquisite, and Belmont

simply perfection! And she quite envies us. Fancy anyone envying us, Lennox—you, and papa, and mamma, and me; who are all of us as miserable as the days are long! Mrs. Dromere thinks that living in a place like this must be like living in Paradise. Paradise! a stucco house, run up thirty or forty years ago, and this wee, little place, with an absurd name, where all the walks and drives are made crooked so that they may appear long. "Belmont!" A good enough present for a baby like Eleanor, who has taken it into her head to want a small estate of her own—but for a home! I wonder what Mrs. Dromere would say to papa's place in Leicestershire? I suppose she would think that people who live there must feel themselves in the seventh heaven! If she only knew!'

After a pause, she added,

'Yet there is a grain of truth in what

the woman says. I myself think of it sometimes, Lennox. How many people, how many thousands of people, might envy us; envy our home, our wealth, all our possibilities of happiness. And why is it, that with all our opportunities we cannot be happy; but must live always under some cloud?'

Her words haunted his thoughts after she had left him, making it no longer possible for him to bestow upon his studies the attention that he desired.

Why were they all under a cloud? Why could they not be happy?

For they were not happy.

He himself was not happy; though at times it seemed to him that, of them all, he was the happiest: or would have been so if he could have been happy with the knowledge that the lives of father and mother and sister were all more infelicitous

than his own. If any expedient could be discovered for taking away the burden of heavy melancholy weighing upon the existence of his father and sister and mother, then, in his own way, he could be happy. His lot was at least more fortunate than theirs in this, that his life contained the things which he desired—books, scholarship, long, calm, studious hours. He led a very quiet life, a tranquil life. Doubtless many men would call it also a melancholy life. Only he did not find it melancholy. It was the life of all his inclinations. He could well remember that even in his childhood he had been a grave little fellow. Long ago his father had been amused by it; at the time when he still took an interest in him. At school, a lad who attracted the attention of the masters, he enjoyed amongst his schoolfellows the

reputation of a duffer, 'a regular *swot.*' No game contained any real interest for him: but the fascination of a book was irresistible; and his day-dream was, when he became a man, to have a library, and to enjoy the delights of unlimited converse with learned literature. Even then Clio was already his favourite, and her pensive sister Polymnia, not the gayer muses of Epic, Comedy, or Song. Now he was already quietly accomplishing his ambition. He was near happiness—if he could have seen those he loved happy.

But neither they were happy, nor he. He could distinctly feel, lowering over his life, that cloud of which his sister spoke. He had resumed, immediately on his arrival at Belmont, the same life that he had been leading in London, the life that he led at college: an existence quite un-

like that of most young men, and already characterised by most of the habits of the confirmed book-worm, a *régime* of regular hours, and of the same occupations pursued day after day. So much time for sleep, so much for meals and exercise, so much for study. Only the quiet contentedness of his college days, of the recent weeks in town had deserted him. Here, he was a new element in the house: but not a bright one. He was out of sympathy with everyone, and everyone (saving his *fiancée*) out of sympathy with him, whilst he seemed to himself more than all the rest to bear the cares of all. His father, who alone could have understood his now more advanced studies, took no interest in him—neither felt any pride in the first class he had achieved, nor concerned himself with his ambitions. His mother became only daily more and more persuaded

that he was 'over-reading' himself, and qualifying either for an early grave, or a lunatic asylum. His sister, whom he loved so tenderly, looked on in despair at her inability to enter into any of his pursuits —and the despondency all around him reacted on his own spirits. Only Eleanor was an element of sunshine in the midst of the gloom. It amused her to hear him talk of his books and studies, and to discuss them with him. She entered into all his ambitions, and had besides a smile ready for everyone—as she always had. Coming to Belmont had not made a difference in her.

But it had made a difference in everyone else, even in himself. He was very conscious of it, and had observed it before he had been twenty-four hours in the house.

At Belmont none of them seemed quite

the same people that they had been at home. The melancholy that had now for so many years brooded over their lives had, as Rosamond remarked, assumed a deeper shade. On his arrival he found many habits of their Leicestershire home altered. The changes, small in importance, taken one by one, altogether gave a new complexion to the lives of the different members of the household. Some of the old servants, left in charge at home, were absent. The hours of the meals had been changed. The old habits of the family, that had continued unaltered so long as he could remember, had yielded to new. Mrs. Peyton no longer made any effort to be present at the breakfast-table, and was never down stairs before noon. Mr. Peyton breakfasted early, before anyone else, and every day sat many hours alone in a small room which he had reserved for

himself. And that was but one instance of the manner in which the family was becoming, with each succeeding month, more and more disunited. It was impossible to avoid a painful impression that, so long as they had remained in the old home, a mere mechanical continuation of the customs of past years had kept up a kind of artificial connection amongst them all: and that now, under new circumstances, when the same way of living was not altogether possible, these mere hollow survivals of a dead past were breaking down, and the aversions of the various members of the family revealing themselves in all their hideousness.

His father and mother lived much more apart. He himself saw much less of Eleanor than in the Easter vacation, simply because she had become her uncle's almost inseparable companion, now that

he no longer either walked or drove with his wife. For he had altogether ceased to do either, and seldom even sat with her.

Rosamond was more than ever neglected and disregarded. Evidences of how little thought was bestowed upon her were only too numerous. Amongst other things, Lennox had, since his arrival, learned—it must be confessed with indignation—that, when the various chambers at Belmont were apportioned to the different members of the family, Rosamond was actually forgotten.

Eleanor excused the oversight. 'Dear uncle had to think of so *many* things,' she said.

And Rosamond explained, with indifference, 'If they had remembered me, the result would have been just the same. Eleanor was, of course, offered the choice of rooms. Then arrangements had to be

made for papa and mamma; for spare rooms, and for you. I must have been stowed away into some odd corner, anyhow.'

But Lennox could not see it in that light. He freely admitted that his betrothed was in many respects very superior to his sister: an opinion too natural to require explanation: but he held that the two girls ought, in justice, to be treated alike by his parents; if some little extra liberality was not shown Rosamond, seeing that she had not, like Eleanor, any fortune of her own.

No one, however, agreed with him, neither his father, nor his mother, nor even Eleanor, though Eleanor was a *fiancée* of the receptive sort, and generally ready to adopt the views that were laid before her.

But she was unable to see that Rosa-

mond was unfairly used, quite unable to admit that the cruellest slights were laid upon her day by day. According to Eleanor, her 'dear uncle's' conduct was absolutely faultless. Again and again she would protest to Lennox,

'I *assure* you, Lennox, that dear uncle wishes to do everything in his power for poor Rosamond.'—That word 'poor' grated sorely on Lennox's ears.—'He would give her *everything* exactly the same as he gives me,—if she would let him. He has tried it, Lennox; he has tried treating her *exactly* as he treats me—since we have been down here. It led only to scenes. No one is more *grieved* than dear uncle to see Rosamond behave as she does. You do not know how *many* troubles dear uncle has.'

As for his father and mother, Lennox knew that it was useless to plead Rosa-

mond's cause with them. Both Rosamond and he had long ago accepted their parents' indifference to themselves as a misfortune to which it behoved them to submit, without entertaining any hopes of an alteration of their sentiments. Only once, since he had been at Oxford, emboldened by his greater independence, Lennox had, on an occasion when Rosamond was almost beside herself, expostulated with his father about the manner in which she was treated. The result was not such as to encourage a repetition of the experiment. His father was angry, and rebuked him with cold dignity; and his mother, when she learned that he had ventured to criticise his father's conduct, was frightened half out of her life.

Only now they were all more unhappy than then. The distance between his sister and himself and their father had

sensibly increased. The cloud of melancholy ever present on his father's brow was deeper than of old, and his manner that of a man crushed by some great calamity. Eleanor dropped hints of distresses that he would not name. Even her sunny brightness seemed now and then a little clouded by the troubles around her. And his mother's health was failing. There could be no doubt about it—though his father seemed to take little notice of the fact: much as if he held that, by giving his wife the change of scene which the medical man had recommended, he had done all he could do, and was no further concerned.

Only, as Rosamond had said, why were all these things thus? Why must they all be unhappy? What was the cloud hanging over them, that had alienated parents and children, that had parted

husband and wife, that forbad them to avail themselves of any of the opportunities of happiness that their wealth afforded them? Was it some fault of their own natures that doomed them to be an unhappy family? And, if so, must it go on always poisoning existence for them—a fate of Tantalus, dooming them to ever increasing despair, with joys in their hands that they could not bring to their lips.

Or if not that—what was the key of the mystery?

He gave up attempting to find it, as he had so often done before, and resumed his book: beginning again to read with an air of resignation that sought relief in simple patience.

Nature had allotted between him and his sister in unequal proportions the stock of patience and pugnacity that should have

been equally divided, to make both alike capable of forbearance and of self-defence. She had given Rosamond all the jealous susceptibilities and resentments of a highly self-centered nature, him all the limitless capacity for endurance of a great unselfishness.

CHAPTER XIII.

Perhaps he was, nevertheless, not of the right temperament for effecting any amelioration in the daily life of the household at Belmont. Perhaps he was too young. The young people of a family cannot do much to restore amity and happiness to a home in which the elders are on bad terms. And perhaps the case was a desperate one, for which no remedies could avail.

At any rate, all that he found possible was a circumspect pursuit of the tactics

which he had long since adopted. Only he gave now closer attention than ever to hurting as few susceptibilities as possible; seeing that the circumstances in which he found himself had become more difficult.

In the morning he paid his mother a visit, to enquire after her health, and to listen with patient resignation to her lamentations on the subject of his 'over-reading' himself. To persuade her that she was mistaken in supposing that he was killing himself with study was impossible, and he abstained from attempting it. In the evening he paid her another visit, to wish her good-night, and to note with pained concern how each succeeding day appeared to leave her weaker, more weary, more querulous, and more despondent about herself. She never desired his society, neither to accompany her on the

short walks she took in the grounds, nor to spend an hour with her, and he dutifully abstained from annoying her with his company, fully conscious that had he omitted his morning and evening visits, she would have declared herself neglected, but hardly have regretted not having seen him. His presence was only one degree less distasteful to her than that of his sister.

With his father, his manner was a sort of dutiful homage combined with as large a proportion of self-obliteration as it was possible to practise without ostentation. He was very desirous in all his thoughts to do his father justice, and to show by his actions that he duly appreciated the liberality with which he had been treated. He was well aware that many a man, unfortunate enough to have an heir distasteful to him, had ere this neglected his son's

education and interests. His father, on the contrary, had both ungrudgingly provided for his public-school and university education, and liberally supplied him with the means of occupying the position to which his birth, and his prospects of being, some day, a wealthy country gentleman, entitled him. Such generosity merited a return, and Lennox desired to make the best one in his power. His father also divined his sentiments, and—in a way—appreciated them. He confessed to himself that 'at any rate Lennox always behaved like a gentleman,' though the fact afforded him no particular satisfaction. The relations between the two were cold, but, thanks to Lennox's careful behaviour, unpleasantnesses never arose. The formality of their intercourse had been rendered less externally apparent by Lennox's having gently dropped into the

habit of behaving to his father after the fashion of a couple of generations since, always calling him 'Sir,' waiting to be addressed before speaking, and showing him a deference which, though it may seem ceremonious because it is no longer fashionable, is never unbecoming. For the rest he accepted, with characteristic courage, his unlucky position of a young man who was endured because he was inevitable, and, as much as possible, kept himself out of his father's sight.

His home life had a brighter side in the affection of his sister and the love of his cousin. That compensated him somewhat for the unkindness of his parents. But even these pleasanter relations presented difficulties, and made it necessary for him to steer a careful course amidst many dangers. It was fatal to forget for an instant that terrible jealousy of his

sister's which rendered the smallest appearance of a slight insupportable. In consequence, his behaviour to both of the girls was governed by an almost painful attention to duty: and the few hours of relaxation which he allowed himself were divided between them with a rigid equity.

He was not altogether happy even in his love. There were hours when doubts would cross his mind whether the happiness of possessing his cousin's affection could be of an enduring kind. At such moments he reflected much upon another of the many problems of the unhappy home life, as insoluble as all the rest. It had always appeared to him unaccountable that his father, who doted upon Eleanor, should at once have given his consent to her marrying a son whom he was himself unable to like. There was something unnatural in the proceeding which nothing

—not even the unvarying justice his father had always done him—sufficed to explain. He could not even flatter himself that his father had been partly influenced by a reluctance to cross the love of his favourite niece. The attachment on Eleanor's side, though sincere, was of no particularly passionate nature. Lennox and she had always been friends; and, even as a child, she had admired him for the chivalry with which he took the part of his neglected and unhappy sister. Afterwards, when the hours of love came—on his side—a double motive urged her to reciprocate his warmer affection. She already respected him: a frame of mind in a girl seldom far removed from love. And to bestow sunshine upon anyone, so long as it lay in her power to do so, was a part of her nature, making her as loth to wound the feelings of a lover as to

give pain of any kind to anyone or anything. It would have distressed her had her uncle forbidden the engagement—because Lennox would have grieved. And she was sincerely pleased when Mr. Peyton gave his assent, as it seemed to her even with a shade of satisfaction, because that rendered it possible for her to make Lennox happy without giving chagrin to anyone. But of real passion there had been on her side about as little as possible.

Lennox was not ignorant of the fact. A much less ardent lover than he was must at once have perceived it. Only he was also well aware how little passion of any sort existed in Eleanor's gentle nature; and did not therefore see in this particular any reason for disquietude.

He was no doubt right. Many a girl of Eleanor's temperament, gentle, yielding,

unselfish, and loving to please, is engaged and married, without her consent having been at all dictated by that real passion wherewith men love, without which they cannot love at all. With a young girl so many other emotions prompt the yearning which passion alone awakens in a man—regard, friendship, affectionateness, admiration, and, not least of all, the mere pleasure of being prized.

Lennox did not think of all that. He was hardly yet sufficiently experienced in life to do so. But he thought of other things. He thought of that consent of his father's, given for reasons to him inexplicable. He speculated whether such a thing was possible as a change of circumstances, and what might then ensue. Would Eleanor love him enough to marry him, if his father no longer approved of the match? He thought of the case of

Eleanor's meeting with some other man, upon whom nature might have bestowed the power to awaken in her feelings stronger than the mere gentleness, the mere unwillingness to give pain which had prompted her promise to marry himself. Then what would ensue?

'Then it would be my turn to surrender her—to spare her pain,' he said to himself.

But other doubts haunted him of an entirely different kind.

There were hours when he feared that his engagement to his cousin was altogether a wrong, a selfish action on his part, which ought never to have been committed.

Ought he to have been so forward to secure his own happiness? Love Eleanor he might, as passionately as he could. But his conscience upbraided him for not having been content to love her, and to

conceal his love,—for his sister's sake.

Rosamond was so friendless, so unhappy!

All the difficulties in which he found himself involved between her and her cousin were occasioned by his engagement to the latter. Had he been unselfish enough to love Eleanor in silence, how much easier would then be the part he was called upon to play! All the leisure he had he might devote to his sister. All his tenderness and affection might be spent upon her; and indeed she stood in need of it! No occasion would exist for daily apprehensions lest he should trouble that terrible jealousy of hers. And he might even persuade her, as she grew older, to become wiser, to understand Eleanor, and to be on better terms with her. Now, of course, she regarded all he said about Eleanor as the special pleadings of love's prejudice. And was it strange that Rosa-

mond felt it hard that he should love Eleanor? After Eleanor had supplanted them both in the affections of their parents; after the long years during which Rosamond and he had been all in all to each other, that he—he also like all the rest—should have given the best of his affections to Eleanor?

As he took his studious strolls under the trees, sometimes with a book in his hand, and sometimes, whilst he walked slowly, exercising his memory, testing how much of what he had learned in the last two or three days it perfectly retained, and how much was not yet certainly stored in his brain, his studies were interrupted by the thought,

'Where so many are unhappy, should one of them have hesitated to suffer for the rest? A self-denial of one—for the happiness of four! I ought to have thought

of that. I was the one who should have denied myself. Then presently I might have had a bachelor home, Rosamond would have kept house for me. Father and mother and Eleanor would have been left together, and would have been happy. And Rosamond and I would have been happy too. Now, instead, I, with a man's characteristic selfishness, have indulged myself with the richest joy of life, a woman's love, and have left my sister, who most of all stands in need of help, to bear alone all that is hardest and most galling in our unhappy home. I ought not to have done that.'

Whence had he this vein of self-accusing disquietude, this pensive melancholy, this conviction of a vocation to procure the repose of others by his own self-denials? No trace of that temper revealed itself elsewhere in the family. There was none

of it in his father's reserve: none of it in his mother's narrow querulousness. Even his cousin's sympathetic gentleness was of an entirely different stamp. Herself full of sunshine, Eleanor diffused about her the radiance of her own existence, and made people forget their sorrows in the brightness of her smiles. But he had no sunshine to impart. His grave pensive life moved amidst many shadows, the tenor of his thoughts was naturally sombre, and his world, like every man's world a reflection of himself, was full of the melancholy of existence, beautiful often, but always sad.

CHAPTER XIV.

Life, meanwhile, is so full of small inconveniences that it is hardly possible for any alteration, howsoever undesirable, to take place in a household without an advantage of some sort accruing to one or another of the family; and Lennox discovered that, although the changes which occurred in his father's household since they had come to reside at Belmont were none of them such as could be wished, yet in one particular the difficult part which he himself was called upon to play was, under the

new *régime*, easier than it had been before.

To divide his attentions between Eleanor and his sister in a manner that should give no cause of offence to the latter was not the difficult task that he had found it during the previous vacations which had immediately followed his engagement to his cousin.

Now that Mr. Peyton had completely left off accompanying his wife on her invalid walks and drives, and had made his niece, more than ever before, his companion of all hours of the day, Eleanor was so frequently requested to give him her society that she had little leisure to bestow upon anyone else.

Lennox, in consequence, saw less of her than he had anticipated. He regretted that, but was, on the other hand, glad to be able to devote a proportionately longer number of hours to his sister.

She at least could not complain that she had less of his company than Eleanor; though she did find occasion to say that he walked and rode with her only because he could not have the society of his *fiancée*.

Still Eleanor and he occasionally found themselves free to spend an hour or two together.

Generally they strolled about the grounds, wandered slowly through the woods, and sat awhile under the shade of the trees. Eleanor had a taste for such quiet rambles through familiar haunts, unlike Rosamond, whose restless spirit, always craving for movement and change, was bent upon wider excursions, at least to be somewhere outside the narrow limits of park railings; to go somewhither where she had not been before, and the farther the better. Lennox talked of what he had

read during the last few days, of his thoughts, and of his ambitions. And Eleanor, always a sympathetic companion, and educated enough to be able to enter with a lively interest into all he said, listened, proud of her lover's scholarship and ambitions, and that she could share his interest in his studies, frankly exchanging her thoughts with him, and giving him in return for the wider horizons his superior knowledge and thoughtfulness opened before her, some of the sunshine of her own bright and joyous life.

Often she would bring with her food for the water-fowls that were kept in one of the larger ponds, amongst whom her appearance immediately occasioned a noisy commotion. As she drew near the pool, sooner than it seemed possible for the birds to be aware of her approach, a sound of eager cackling began under the grey

willows, significant of anticipations of a windfall of broken bread. That instantly attracted the attention of the other feathered denizens of the locality, and in another minute all the birds to the youngest duckling, quitting the quest of dainty worms in the mud, the pleasure of slow luxurious gliding in and out of patches of sunshine and shade amidst the tall reeds, or the gentle digestion of afternoon naps, turned their beaks towards her, waddled as fast as they could to the water, if they had the misfortune to be on land, and in a single flock came racing across the pond, with the energy of birds who have learned by experience the penalties attached to arriving too late.

Ducks do not know much, as, without unkind reflections upon the shape of their heads, may be inferred from their monstrous loquacity. Evidently they had none

of them yet discovered that it is wise of those who have found out a good thing to keep quiet about it. But they knew when the girl with the bread had a stranger at her side, a dark, melancholy man, who had none of the appearance of a man likely to bring ducks bread or corn, and accordingly held back rather shyly, unless Lennox remained at some little distance from the pond.

So he, on these occasions, remained in the background, whence indeed he could better watch the animated scene—the charmingly dressed young girl, leaning over the stone balustrade at the end of the pond, her graceful figure, her dainty head crowned with its aureole of crisp hair escaping from beneath her hat, her sunny face, her sparkling young eyes, her elastic poses and quick movements, as, with light

silvery laughter, she flung the food hither and thither, contriving that the biggest birds should not gobble up all the pieces, that a stray crumb or two should fall to the lot of the bold little dickies who flew down from the trees to snatch a morsel of the feast, and that some corn was always left for some wood-pigeons who were beginning to understand that they might approach her without danger, though they were always the last to appear. All around her were wings glancing in the sun as the birds came down to her from the trees or crowded around her on the grass, coming without hesitation close to her feet, and brushing themselves against her dress. Beyond lay the sleepy pool, of a deep rich brown where the weeds crowded it or the shadows fell in thicker masses, and, where the water was more

open, full of glassy reflections. Or if the hour happened to be a little later than usual, then the rays of a sinking sun reflected from a spot of open water fell full on his face, and the pool by which the young girl stood with her birds, indistinct in the effulgence, became a sea of light, around whose edges everything was blurred in the glow, too bright to be regarded, save for a few seconds, by human eyes.

Those were moments when as Lennox's ravished eyes rested on her loveliness, as the thought flooded his soul, too small to contain all its meaning, that she was plighted to him, he seemed to himself the possessor of something divine, and to have neither language nor thoughts that could express the love with which he worshipped her.

How passing fair she was—his beautiful love! What an impersonation of all that

was sweetest and loveliest under the sun. The very perfection of ravishing girlhood, tender as a beautiful flower, she filled all his life with fragrance, and his heart with devotion. She was his guiding star, his consolation, his strength, his hope, the joy of his existence. She had crept into his heart when she was a little child, and had grown there until she had filled his own being with herself, and had become the soul of his soul, the life of his life: only—there was an 'only' in all Lennox Peyton's thoughts—only he was so utterly unworthy of her.

As they strolled on again after the birds had finished the last of her store, he was timid and reticent. His thoughts became stirred with a consciousness of walking side by side with some high-born being of an order of existence superior to his own, whose very presence was a consecration

too sacred for the profanation of words, whilst all his emotions concentrated themselves into some reiterated thought, in the broken language that must have been the earliest speech of primitive man.

'Mine! Mine! My love! My love!'

Then she would laugh, and want to know why he was so grave: would ask, with wonderingly soft eyes,

'Dear me! What *is* the matter, Lennox? Why are you, all of a sudden, as solemn as a judge?'

And next, within a minute, whilst he was still at a loss for a reply, she, with her happy knack of instantly puttting everyone at their ease, would again set the conversation going, by taking some occasion to resume the discussion of the topics in which they had been interested when she stopped to feed the birds.

It was whilst they were thus, one afternoon, together in the woods that Lennox broached a subject, respecting which he had, ever since his arrival at Belmont, been wishing, and hesitating, to speak to her.

He had the day before received a letter from Marmaduke Torres, the contents of which assisted to persuade him no longer to postpone the question which he was desirous to ask.

'Do you remember, Eleanor,' he said, 'the summer and autumn which we some years since spent near Pangbourne?'

'Perfectly.'

'Can you remember anything about the end of September and the beginning of October of that year? Any incidents, I mean, that would fall just about that date.

That would be shortly after I had left and gone back to school.'

Eleanor thought for a minute or two, and then replied,

'Oh, yes: *ever* so many things.'

'Quite ordinary things: things of every-day life?'

'Yes. Why do you ask?'

'I will tell you presently. After I had left, you and Rosamond still went sometimes on the water?'

'And uncle too: in fact, *all* of us; pretty often. It was still fine.'

'Do you remember if Rosamond used ever to go on the water alone?'

Eleanor looked at him; a side glance that was instantaneous, and, as he had his eyes on the ground, unnoticed. But Lennox fancied that he remarked a shade of difference in her voice as she replied,

'Sometimes: oftener than dear uncle

wished. He *disliked* her going on the water alone. But she was just then in one of her strange moods.'

'I know. That was so before I left.'

'It was worse after you left. We had *scenes* almost every day.'

'Do you remember one evening; rain had been threatening in the afternoon, and then about dusk it came on to blow and pour in torrents?'

Eleanor stopped.

'Who told you about *that*, Lennox?' she asked.

Their eyes met.

'Then you know about Rosamond's being on the water that evening?'

'But *who* told you?' repeated Eleanor, as they walked on again. 'Not Rosamond?'

'No. I heard of something—and

naturally I wanted to know. You know all about it!'

'Ask me *nothing*, Lennox. I promised not to tell.'

'I fancy that I must know almost as much as you.'

'Then tell me nothing. I would so much rather hear nothing.'

'Only your surprise at my question has confessed that something did happen.'

'Then, if you have surprised me into betraying a secret, Lennox, at least do not speak of it to anyone.'

'It is not a thing of which I should speak.'

'Ah—but I mean not even to Rosamond. She would *never* be persuaded to believe that I had not broken my promises.'

'I will not speak of it to Rosamond. I did not mean to do so. I wanted only to know. Rosamond must have been

more unhappy than I supposed. Because you see, that was really terrible. You know what I mean.'

'It *was* terrible, Lennox: when she was scarcely more than a child too! I was horrified. It haunted me for months. Had she not bound me with promises I could not break, I must have spoken, if only to unload my mind of a secret so awful. But, after all, I suspect that silence *was* best. Speaking to dear uncle would have *altered* nothing; he could only have been unutterably shocked, and aunty would have said all kinds of things, and Rosamond might have been goaded to some further act of madness. She was quite like a *wild* thing after you left us.'

'It is piteous to think that she should have been so unhappy as to meditate destroying herself, when she was only sixteen,' said Lennox, purposely offering

a remark that might palliate his sister's conduct.

'No one was *making* her unhappy. Dear uncle and aunt treated us both exactly alike. And I did all I could to please her. But you know—that is *quite* impossible, for me to do anything that pleases Rosamond.'

'I know. I am very sorry for it. I wish you and she could be friends.'

'I wish it too, Lennox. That we are not so is not *my* fault. I have tried to make friends with Rosamond—how many times I could not tell you. Only it seems impossible. I have done everything in my power. I am sorry for Rosamond, and I would gladly love her, if she would let me. Only you know she will not.'

Lennox knew that. And he reflected that the heart of man knows few sharper pangs than those which are occasioned

by the fact, so familiar to all, that those whom a man loves best can never see their way to liking one another.

That evening his studies were again interrupted by anxious thoughts. Marmaduke Torres had alluded in his letter to that possible visit to the neighbourhood of Wold, of which he had more than once spoken to Lennox. Lennox had also mentioned the fact to his father, who, without waiting for him to suggest inviting his college chum to spend a few days with them, had himself at once proposed,

'The Torres are nice people. You might ask him here.'

He had added also,

'He is a cousin of Mrs. Dromere's, is he not? We might invite her to dinner to meet him.'

As Rosamond had prognosticated, they were seeing a good deal of Mrs. Dromere.

But Lennox was not thinking of her. He was debating with himself what would ensue if Rosamond met Marmaduke Torres. There was no longer any doubt that she was the girl whom Torres had seen on the river.

CHAPTER XV.

As Lennox now sometimes claimed his *fiancée* during the few hours which his father left her to call her own, it followed that Mrs. Peyton was on these occasions reduced to accepting as a companion of her invalid walks and drives the very last person she would have selected—that is to say, Rosamond.

Whenever that happened, Mrs. Peyton made herself very melancholy over her unfortunate lot.

'No one,' she asserted, in her low, plaintive voice, 'ever thought of her. She

was actually forgotten by all the rest of the household, bent only upon their own occupations and pleasures. Everyone knew how much she disliked to walk or drive with Rosamond. Rosamond always made her nervous. No wonder that instead of growing stronger, as the doctors had predicted, she felt weaker every day, when no consideration was shown her. Happily she would not be much longer a burden to them all.' And so on, *ad infinitum*, after the manner of the peevish invalid.

She even accused Eleanor of selfishness.

'You are again going out with Lennox? Oh, yes, go! Go and enjoy yourselves. Never mind me. I am of no importance. Only you, Eleanor, are growing just as selfish as all the others.'

'But, aunty dear, I *can't* be in two places at once, you know,' Eleanor would

then say, apologetically, with one of her gentle smiles. 'I must give Lennox a little of my society, must I not? Besides, you know, dear uncle would not like me to take *no* notice of Lennox.'

'No, no; you must do as your uncle wishes, Eleanor: always do as your uncle wishes,' Mrs. Peyton invariably replied, in nervous haste. 'Only no one ever thinks of me. You all know how I dread having Rosamond with me.'

'But then, aunty dear, why not let the coachman drive you? or, if you are going for a walk, take Mrs. Norton with you.'—Mrs. Norton was Mrs. Peyton's nurse.—'You know that you always find Mrs. Norton comforting.'

'No. I do not wish my servants to know how I am neglected by everyone. Though, of course, they know it already. Rosamond must accompany me.'

'I'll tell her, aunty dear,' then concluded Eleanor, without attempting any further discussion of the point, which would have been useless.

She was well aware of the real reasons why her aunt would not consent either to be driven by the coachman, or to have her nurse accompany her in her walks in the grounds. The coachman would naturally not presume to talk to his mistress, and the nurse would follow her at a respectful distance, and Mrs. Peyton would, in consequence, feel herself alone.

There was nothing of which Mrs. Peyton had so great a horror as of being alone, 'with no one to speak to,' as she herself would have said. From her girlhood she had been one of those unfortunate people to whom speech is almost as necessary as breath, and silence a torture

accompanied by all the unpleasant sensations of suffocation. Some one to listen to what she had to say had been always indispensable. With advancing years, and the peevishness of infirmity, the habit of incessant talking had grown upon her until it had reached such a pitch that, so long as she was awake, she required some victim whose ears she might fatigue with the incessant murmurs of a tongue that clacked, clacked, clacked all day long, without saying anything; a sort of Saint Vitus' dance of the vocal organ, unable for a single minute to be still.

When Mr. Peyton, thirty-five years before, fell in love with her, he fancied that, in addition to her other charms, a childishly pretty face, a silly little head always full of babyishness, and an almost ridiculous timidity that was delightfully

in need of perpetual protection, one of the most winning things about her was that merry tongue of hers, that chattered, chattered, chattered perpetually; like a brook chatters over a shoal of stones. He did not at that time reflect upon the woman past middle age, no longer capable of being amused, nor herself at all amusing, possessed with an incurable habit of wagging her tongue in one perpetual wearisome babble.

Men in love seldom do look ahead for such contingencies, or reflect upon the metamorphoses of their idols that must ensue beneath the touch of time.

But to continue. As Mrs. Peyton must have some one to whom to talk whilst she walked or drove, and as no one else was available, rather than suffer the tortures of silence, she endured the society of her daughter.

Rosamond, upon receiving the various ungracious intimations that her mother desired her to accompany her, invariably placed herself at her disposal, and conducted herself, whilst they were together, both with a certain daughterly dutifulness and also a great deal more gracefully than might have been anticipated, seeing that she was well aware that her mother would not have for a minute endured her society could she have found anyone else—even Mrs. Dromere—to listen to the ceaseless outpouring of her woes.

She pitied her mother. Her own fate and her mother's were not altogether unlike. There had been a time, well within her recollection, when Mr. Peyton still treated his wife affectionately, and was concerned to see her slowly sinking into a state of ill-health. That was before Eleanor inherited a fortune, and began alone to ab-

sorb all the attentions and all the affections of every member of the household, Rosamond only excepted. Afterwards, as her father and mother, wholly captivated by Eleanor's ever increasing charms, had lost all interest in her brother and herself, so her father had lost also all interest in his wife, leaving her also forlorn, as her children had been left before her. Rosamond knew the desolation of that: to have been loved, and to be loved no more, because supplanted by a stranger; and her mother commanded her commiseration. It is to be feared that she did not command her respect. There was not much, save similarity of misfortune in common between the weak querulousness of the mother, afraid of everyone—except her niece, and the exaggerated self-assertiveness of the daughter, enraged with everyone—except her brother, but afraid of nobody.

That did not prevent Rosamond from doing her best to be companionable and daughterly.

But all her poor attempts at agreeableness and dutifulness were alike wasted. Her mother was disposed rather to take offence at them than to be propitiated—(are not the gentlest attentions of those whom we dislike disagreeable?)—and constantly interrupted her other lamentations to deplore her misfortune of having Rosamond with her instead of Eleanor, or to dilate upon the selfishness of the whole family in condemning her to take the morsel of exercise so essential to her health in the society of a daughter who always 'gave her the nerves.'

By way of excuse for the poor woman it must be admitted that she did really live in perpetual terror of these two children of hers, neither of whom she found it

possible to understand, whilst she was alike unable to divest herself of painful recollections of their past peccadilloes, and in ceaseless dread of what strange things one or other of them—and more particularly Rosamond—might do next: like a poor timid old hen, who has hatched a brood of daring ducklings, and lives in a state of unceasing alarm about the incomprehensible behaviour of her unaccountable offspring.

It must be admitted that events often justified Mrs. Peyton's apprehensions. Suddenly, at moments when she least expected it, Rosamond or her brother—he was, in a different way, almost as alarming as his sister—said or did something that scared their mother almost out of her wits.

That also happened now, before Mrs. Peyton and Rosamond had taken many walks together.

It was on an afternoon when they had strolled into the woods. They had walked for some little time, when Mrs. Peyton suddenly declared herself fatigued, and began to deplore the distance they had come, one greater than she felt herself equal to retracing.

'We can go back by a shorter way, mamma,' suggested Rosamond.

'Only over that dreadful bridge across the deep pool. I will not go across that bridge, Rosamond. It is not safe.'

'The gardener drove across it with a load of gravel this morning; so it must be quite strong enough to bear us, mamma.'

'That is right, Rosamond. Contradict your mother. I know what you all think of me. But that bridge is not safe. No one but you would have suggested my crossing it. Only this is what I must expect when I come out with you. I wish

Eleanor was with me: she would know some other way back that does not lead over the bridge.'

'I know two others, mamma. But they are both longer than the route by which we came. We are really at no distance from the house, but this absurd place is all laid out in paths made as crooked as possible.'

Mrs. Peyton had sat down.

'Eleanor would have known some shorter path,' she remarked. 'She ought to have come with me. Only you are all so selfish.'

Rosamond was reflecting, 'I wonder what mamma thinks when she says things like that? Does she really believe that Eleanor can discover some shorter path when it does not exist? She must be perfectly aware that it does not exist: for she knows every path in the grounds as well as I do.'

That was true. But Mrs. Peyton's mind was not one that worked by logical methods. And what would have happened if Eleanor had been there was this. Eleanor would have said, that 'perhaps the other path was a little *wee* bit shorter. She did not quite know;' and so she would have coaxed Mrs. Peyton to attempt it. Meanwhile, she would have amused her, and have made her sit down a great many times. So by degrees they would have got towards home. Then Eleanor would have remarked, 'Do you know, aunty dear, I do believe that this path is *longer* than the other!' After that she would have made a joke at her own stupidity. 'How could I have been so dull as to have made such a silly mistake!' Thereupon Mrs. Peyton would have asserted that she had made no mistake, and that the longer path was by ever so much the shorter. And,

having herself said that, Mrs. Peyton would firmly believe it to be true, and feel convinced that Eleanor was 'a dear, good, kind, clever girl,' whom it was always a comfort to have with her.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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